

ORGANIZATIONAL RHETORIC FROM THE OVAL OFFICE:
A WEICKIAN ANALYSIS OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

A Dissertation

by

JENNIFER WILLYARD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2008

Major Subject: Communication

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ABSTRACT

Organizational Rhetoric from the Oval Office:

A Weickian Analysis of the Bush Administration. (August 2008)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Katherine I. Miller

This project attempts to bridge the gap between organizational theory and political rhetoric by approaching the study of the George W. Bush administration through the lens of Weick's theory of organizing. I specifically argue for the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system, as demonstrated by the media and the members of the administration themselves. Second, I argue for the constraining nature of the enacted environment through an analysis of the administration's position on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. I find that Bush's decision to veto stem cell legislation in 2006 was a consequence of his identity as an Evangelical Christian and of his definition of what it means to be a leader. Finally, I argue for the importance of requisite variety in the administration's rhetorical constructions of the problems facing Social Security and the proposed methods of program reform. The administration's proposal demonstrates the necessity for a rhetorical "matching" between the construction of the problem and the construction of the solution. Finally, I turn to Crable and situate the findings within Crable's model of organizational rhetoric.

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Finally, thanks to Jill McMillan for introducing me to organizational rhetoric and the fourth system of rhetoric. The time spent in your den discussing theory and developing ideas about the important role of organizational rhetoric in today’s society proved invaluable to this project. Someday we’ll finish that Kyoto project...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Political Rhetoric in the Organizational System	2
II FILLING A RHETORICAL VOID	12
Traditional Models	12
New Models	20
Communication Critique	33
Weick's Theory of Organizing.....	41
III A TIGHTLY COUPLED (WAR) CABINET	56
System Coupling	57
Method	63
The Tightly Coupled Bush Administration	66
Conclusion.....	111
IV STEM CELLS AND THE ENACTED ENVIRONMENT.....	112
The Enacted Environment.....	112
Method	117
Embryonic Stem Cell Research.....	117
George W. Bush and Stem Cells	120

CHAPTER		Page
	Commitment, Social Information Processing, and the Religious Right	128
	Commitment, Social Information Processing, and Leadership	148
	The Enacted Environment and Stem Cell Policy	156
	Conclusion.....	157
V	THE SIMPLE COMPLEXITY OF SOCIAL SECURITY	159
	Method	161
	Weick and Requisite Variety.....	164
	George W. Bush and Social Security Reform.....	166
	Discussion and Conclusion	185
VI	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	192
	Crable and Tightly Coupled Systems.....	194
	Crable and the Enacted Environment.....	200
	Crable and Requisite Variety	204
	Conclusion.....	212
	REFERENCES.....	215
	VITA	245

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Interaction of Personal and Organizational Variables.....	22
Figure 2 Number of Workers Per Beneficiary in 1950, 2005, and in the Future.....	171
Figure 3 The White House Projects That in 2018 Social Security Will Begin to Pay More in Benefits than It Collects in Payroll Taxes	174

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, Richard Crable introduced rhetoricians to the concept of the fourth great system of rhetoric. Drawing on the work of Douglas Ehninger, Crable argued that this modern, contemporary system of rhetoric was organizational in nature and proposed that rhetors function in society as spokespersons rather than by vocalizing their own individual viewpoints or beliefs. As examples of speakers under the constraints of the fourth system, Crable pointed to the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan U.S. presidential administrations. He essentially argued that Carter did not understand that he was to act as a spokesperson and placed too much emphasis on his own ideas. Reagan, however, was able to quickly learn that his skills as an actor in the Hollywood sense would serve him better in his presidency than his skills as a Burkean actor. He quickly adapted his former occupation to his new office and achieved historical success for his communicative abilities.

Crable also outlined a set of constructs that effectively described the characteristics of organizational rhetoric in the fourth system (of the type he identifies in the Carter and Reagan administrations), but what he did not clearly do was provide scholars with ways of making arguments about how rhetoric functions within the system of organizational rhetoric. Political scientists have adopted concepts of organizational communication to gain insight into presidential administrations with a similar end: they

can describe organizational characteristics but have very little to say about political or organizational *rhetoric*. To help fill this void in the literature, this study examines several rhetorical events of the George W. Bush administration and analyzes them using Weick's theory of organizational sensemaking. I argue that this theory is appropriate as it focuses on the communicative nature of organizations and moves away from the managerial bias that is present in much of the political science literature on the "organizational presidency." Instead of describing hierarchical or bureaucratic forms inherent in the political system (especially among White House staff members), this project will reveal important facets of political rhetoric in the fourth great system of rhetoric.

Political Rhetoric in the Organizational System

As Richard Crable argued, we are living in the time of the fourth system of rhetoric. All rhetoric that is produced today, he stated, is united by a common concern for the rhetor. This rhetoric is organizational in nature, and although the orator may be a single individual, his or her speech is meant to represent that of the organization. To gain a richer understanding of Crable's conclusions, I turn to a discussion of the origins of the systems of rhetoric and Crable's extension of Ehninger's project.

In 1968, Douglas Ehninger argued that there had been three great systems of rhetoric. These were represented by the classical works of the ancient Greeks, the British rhetoric of the 18th century, and the work of American rhetoricians since the 1930s. Each system had its own goals and characteristics, and though Ehninger did not claim that all works or texts of a given period will fit into his seemingly neat categories,

he argued that his systems represent important general trends and developments in the field of rhetoric.

Ehninger stated that the first system of rhetoric, that of the classical period, arose in response to the need for a description and definition of speech, the activity that was the foundation of the polis. Ehninger (1992, p. 16) noted that with the development of “democratic institutions in the city states of Sicily and Greece, speechmaking as an activity found new avenues of expression and gained in importance until it came to be regarded as an art form as well as a social instrument.” People needed to know what speech was, how they could talk about it, and the ways in which it was used. Additionally, speech had to be taught in order for each citizen to effectively represent himself and his peers in the courts of law and the legislature. As Ehninger (1992, p. 16) stated, in the classical period speech had to be “methodized.”

Because of this emphasis on description and pedagogy, Ehninger (1992, p. 17) claimed that the first system was distinguishable by its “grammatical nature.” Although not its only focus, the “central concern and principal contribution of the classical rhetoric [was] the development of the syntax of the speech act” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 17). As Ehninger argued, the ancients were faced with grammatical tasks because one must describe and understand a construct before one can use it in more advanced ways, and the classical rhetoricians were extremely effective at methodizing a grammar of rhetoric. As Ehninger (1992, p 17) noted, “even today any system of rhetoric which fails to encompass the basic terms and relationships which [the classical rhetoricians] isolated is properly regarded as incomplete.” The obsession with pedagogy, however, led the

ancients to oversimplify rhetoric into formulaic compositions and demonstrate an unsophisticated belief in the relationship between sender, message, and receiver.

According to Ehninger, the problems of the classical period were first improved upon by British writers of the 18th century such as Lord Kames, John Ogilvie, and George Campbell. Whereas the classical period was characterized by the grammar of rhetoric, Ehninger (1992, p. 18) argued that the second system of rhetoric is “best described as ‘psychological.’” This name comes from the rhetoricians’ new concern for “the relation between the communicative act and the mind of the listener-reader” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 18) and mirrored the increased interest in psychology that was characteristic of the time.

The second system of rhetoric moved from describing and teaching to a more sophisticated analysis of the “message-mind relationship” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 19). The rhetoricians of the 18th century were interested in the mind of listener or reader, “premising their doctrine upon assumptions concerning the ways in which men come to know what they know, believe what they believe, and feel what they feel” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 19). Because of the audience-centeredness of this system, Ehninger claimed that it started from an epistemological standpoint rather than a grammatical standpoint. The goal of rhetorical studies was not to teach citizens how to speak, but rather to enlighten, please, move, or influence the audience (Ehninger, 1992).

The second system was further extended by mostly American writers from the 1930s to the late 1960s when Ehninger was theorizing his classification of rhetoric. He described the rhetoric of the third period as “social” because the practitioners of the third

system “view rhetoric as an instrument for understanding and improving human relations” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 21). This system was also born out of social necessity. This time period was characterized in “tensions and breakdowns in human relations” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 21) caused by and further causing depressions, wars, and “the suicide of the race itself” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 21). This time of social unrest on the personal, national, and international levels called for a rhetoric that was meant to heal these broken relationships by “improving the processes by which man communicates with man.” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 21).

Ehninger presented Kenneth Burke as an example of a third system rhetorician because of his focus on the interplay between speaker, message, and audience. Burke argued that language was symbolic and that the analysis of these symbols reveal human motive in relationships. His concepts of identification and consubstantiation could help to find and promote the peace and connection that was so needed at the time. As Ehninger (1992, p. 22) argued, scholars in the third system of rhetoric were interested in language, but “they recognize that while language is the central instrument of human communication, other symbol systems, some of which lie beneath the sender’s or receiver’s threshold of awareness, also may carry message which influence thought or behavior.” Rhetoric is not delivered or received in a vacuum, but rather a society, a context, and/or a relationship, placing the emphasis on both the “ethical and aesthetic dimensions of communication” (Ehninger, 1992, p. 23). Each of these “social” aspects of rhetoric plays an important role in the rhetoric of the third system.

My interest in Ehninger is not so much because of his reflections on the past—indeed, there are many ways to organize the world of rhetoric and the connections between the past and present (see, for example, Baumlin & Baumlin, 1989; Foss & Griffin, 1995; Ianetta & Fredal, 2006; Vitanza, 1987; Welch, 1987). Instead, my interest lies in the extensions of this “modernist rhetorician’s” (Gronbeck, 2003) work.

Ehninger’s argument was embraced and updated by Richard Crable in 1990. In his work, Crable claimed that “organizations should be defined rhetorically;” as a consequence, he argued, the rhetoric of today is inherently organizational (Crable, 1990, p. 115). Crable argued not only that the fourth system of rhetoric is organizational in nature, but also that it fits with Ehninger’s original schema. It advances previous systems, but it brings a new subject into focus: the rhetor. It also differs from the previous systems because it emphasizes ontology rather than pragmatics (first system), epistemology (second system), or axiology (third system). This led Crable (1990, p. 117) to conclude that the “‘systems of rhetoric’ actually were ‘systems of rhetorical theory’ instead of systems of practice” as Ehninger originally claimed. Crable next turned to a more precise definition and model of organizational rhetoric.

At its core, the fourth system of rhetoric argues that “discourse is produced by organizations, not individuals; it is organizational rhetoric” (Ehninger, 1990, p. 117). This statement has ontological implications because rhetors are no longer people, but rather organizations; individuals are inseparable from the organizations to which they belong, thus individual speakers convey messages on behalf of their organizations.

Working from Burke's pentad, Crable argued that the result of the organizational system of rhetoric is an actor/agency switch. He stated that

in the "organizational system" of rhetoric in which we live—the evidence is clear that actors in Burke's sense seldom, if ever, instigate anything. Rhetors who actually represent **purely** their own views may be extinct, if they ever existed. Instead, rhetors speak for, or represent, certain—sometimes multiple, overlapping, or complementary—"organized interests."... the actors **are the** agencies. (Crable, 1990, p. 120, emphasis author's own)

Speakers essentially become spokespersons who serve as representatives of the organization. The rhetoric they deliver is not their own but rather the words of the organization. The fourth system of rhetoric is further distinguished from the first three because the end goal of these organizational rhetors is to secure support for their organizations in the form of money, legitimacy, acquiescence, etc.

The fourth system of rhetoric definitely influences the way scholars should approach the study of rhetoric. Instead of applying concepts from the first, second, or third system, they must study the texts of organizations with the characteristics or critical probes of organizational rhetoric in mind. These include: a production or financing organization; perceived circumstances from the viewpoint of both the organization and the audience; organizational self-concepts (values, judgments, fears); audiences; support as the organizational goal; "stage managers" (consultants, public relations experts); script writers; a set or forum; media delivery systems; message intermediaries; spokespersons; and evidence of impact, feedback, and responses. These factors become

the “model” for studying texts in the fourth system of rhetoric, although many of them are descriptive rather than critical. This project attempts to integrate the descriptive elements into an analytical and critical project centered in organizational rhetoric.

Finally, Crable discussed representation in organizational rhetoric. For Crable, representation is not *vorstellung* or *darstellung* (as explained by Stephen Toulmin, 1971), but rather a magical sleight-of-hand. He claimed that the “magic is not that we see things ‘appear’ and ‘disappear;’ the magic is that we fail to see what really is occurring” (Crable, 1990, p. 123). Audiences are fooled and treat the spokesperson as a speaker. We look to where the spokesperson points us, not to the place from which the organization is distracting us through their use of a spokesperson. As Crable (1990, p. 123) stated, “The actor in the Hollywood sense ‘appears’ and the actor in Burke’s sense remains behind the scenes, not as part of the scene.” These concepts, then, form the characteristics of the fourth system of rhetoric, and they should inform the reading of the texts that are produced in contemporary society. Because all rhetoric is conceived of as organizational in nature, the fourth system of rhetoric represents an attempt at a general theory of communication.

Despite Crable’s explication of a model of organizational rhetoric that grew from the trajectory of rhetoric’s history, the field of organizational rhetoric has not followed the course that Crable predicted. Meisenbach and McMillan (2006, p. 100) claimed that although scholars of organizational rhetoric “have a unique responsibility to explore the rhetorical commonality of all collectivities and what it means for message makers and message receivers in organizations, of all ilks,” most scholars “have stayed fairly close

to their organizational communication roots where for-profit business organizations were the central focus of attention.” They noted the contributions made by organizational rhetoric scholars in the areas of crisis management (legitimacy and apologia), maintenance communication (issue management, identity, and identification), power and voice, and corporate social responsibility and business ethics, but argued that organizational rhetoric scholars “have failed to make the case to their colleagues in related communication fields” (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006, p. 101), including political communication and presidential studies. A quick survey of the literature that cites Crable’s 1990 article reveals this trend. The few articles found cite Crable in studies of organizational legitimacy (Boyd, 2000), public relations and issue management (Ihlen, 2002), and organizational apologia (Rowland & Jerome, 2004). One exception to this is a piece that uses the concept of strategic ambiguity to analyze Phil Gramm’s 1992 keynote address to the Republican National Convention (Sellnow, 1992). Although Sellnow does not directly analyze the speech using Crable’s model of organizational rhetoric, it is an example of a study that takes organizational theory to new—specifically political—grounds.

For the most part, however, the project of uniting organizational theory, organizational rhetoric, and politics has been left to “future scholars.” Meisenbach and McMillan (2006, p. 128) specifically spoke of Crable when they stated that “future theory and study will also explore how an organizational rhetoric operates from its often obscure and uncertain agency.” Cheney and Lair (2004, p. 77) similarly stated, “Perhaps the most important contribution that the study of organizational rhetoric can offer is

assistance in understanding the nexus of persuasive activity where polity, and culture meet.” I argue that the time for these studies is now and that a logical place to start in the spirit of “blurring boundaries” (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006, p. 100) is with the study of politics and the presidency.

Crable’s theory is important for the study of political rhetoric; if all rhetoric truly is organizational, this approach must be cogent for presidential administrations as well. This is indicated in the subtle shift in our talk from “presidents” to “administrations” and the influx of media consultants, political advisors, and campaign managers, but the door to this project is also opened by Crable himself. In his explication of organizational rhetoric, he uses Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan as examples. He argues that Jimmy Carter failed to understand that he was to be a spokesperson and conducted himself as a thinking president; he thought himself out of re-election. He further argues that Reagan stumbled upon his success and his label as the “Great Communicator” through reliance on his Hollywood acting skills and the abandonment of his role as a Burkean actor.

What Crable does not do, however, is subject the rhetoric of the Carter or Reagan administration to any more than a passing reference in his work. He assumes the role of organizational rhetoric in the administration rather than seeking out evidence of its existence and influence. This is not surprising, as Crable does not provide a clear method for analysis of a (broadly defined) organizational rhetoric. Instead he offers a descriptive heuristic that defines the pieces of organizational rhetoric without providing the analytical tools for rhetoricians to draw from in examinations of political rhetoric. The task of this project, then, is to look to existing organizational theory that can be

applied in new ways to add a fresh perspective to the study of presidential administrations. Political scientists, as discussed in the following chapter, have called for a new approach to studying the presidency, and this project will help to break the field of organizational rhetoric from its corporate bounds.

In the following chapters, I first turn to the existing literature on presidential organizing that is found largely in the field of political science. I examine the traditional and new methods of modeling presidential administrations, and I critique these models by looking to political scientists for their concerns about the inadequacy of the existing models. I then critique the models from a communication perspective and present Weick's theory of organizing as a theoretical approach that is able to ameliorate many of the current deficiencies in presidential studies. Next, I focus on three case studies from the George W. Bush administration and look to Weick to argue for the administration as a tightly coupled system, to explore the constraining nature of the enacted environment related to stem cell policy in the United States, and to argue for a mismatch in the rhetorical requisite variety of the problems confronting Social Security and solutions for reform offered by the Bush administration. Finally, I return to Crable to situate these findings within the context of the fourth system of rhetoric as a way to walk through the door which Crable first opened in 1990.

CHAPTER II

FILLING A RHETORICAL VOID

Crable's model of the fourth great system of rhetoric is one that focuses on the intersection of politics, organizations, and rhetoric. His examples of Presidents Reagan and Carter as "spokespersons" rather than speakers provide an opportunity for organizational scholars to not only examine politics in general, but the presidency in particular. Crable clearly makes a connection between presidential administrations and organizations, and political scientists have also observed the "president-as-manager" and "administrations as organizations" relationships. In fact, many scholars from political science have undertaken the task of linking organizations and politics in theoretical ways, and this has proven to be an evolutionary project. To give light to the current research, its foundations and its importance for this study, this chapter will review the two traditional models that connect politics and organizations: the institutional and the idiosyncratic models. I will also summarize the inherent problems in the models to which political scientists have drawn our attention and review the attempts that have been made to overcome these deficiencies. I finally point to areas in existing research that provide an opportunity for communication scholars to advance the field through the use of an analytical lens based on the work of Karl Weick.

Traditional Models

The two broad models that have traditionally been used in the political science literature to describe the organization of presidential administrations and the impact of

organization on decision-making are the institutional approach and the idiosyncratic approach. The two approaches can be thought of as two “first attempts” to explicitly connect the study of the presidency with theory outside of political science. The idiosyncratic model most clearly draws from organizational psychology while the institutional models find their roots in institutional theories, including organizational theory and models of decision-making. Both the idiosyncratic and institutional models are very well-documented in the literature; therefore I will briefly review each here and provide references to the literature for more detailed information (see, for example, Burke, 1992; and Shapiro, Kumar, & Jacobs, 2000).

The institutional model argues that because the political pressures faced by all presidents are similar (i.e. presidents participate in a system in which organizations and individuals compete to enact their policies), similar structures form to deal with these pressures. As a result, presidential decision-making is relatively constant across all administrations. In the institutional model, as Newmann (2004, p. 275) stated, scholars “view decision processes as a competitive struggle for control of policy between governmental officials and departments. Policy choices are made through negotiations among these officials and departments.” This model, then, accounts for bureaucratic and organizational structures, competition, and processes.

The institutional model is evident in several types of political science literature, one of which is research that discusses the formal organization of administrations. As Walcott and Hult (2005, p. 304) stated, “The White House is necessarily a hierarchy. No one is the president’s equal.” Here the researchers argued that the similar pressures

faced by all presidents, as well as the inherent power differences between parties of the executive branch, will necessarily lead to a hierarchical form of administration organization—regardless of the person who occupies the top position. This does not mean, however, that there is no variance in the organization of the administration. Two examples would be Carter's early attempt at the "hub and spokes" as compared to Reagan's use of the "troika."

Despite small changes or variations, Walcott and Hult (2005) argued that there is a routinized method for structuring the White House that they name the "standard model." In this model there is a rather steep hierarchy, and policy issues are discussed in memo form: selected individuals are presented with a document which states policy options under consideration. Individuals are asked to respond to the memo with their policy preference and a statement of why that options is most favorable. Under this model, which has been widely adopted through either choice or necessity, the president is removed from actual policy conversation but still presumably receives the benefit of experienced insiders. As Walcott and Hult (2005, p. 311-312) stated, "Perhaps the primary reason for the widespread acceptance of the necessity, if not always the desirability, of the standard model revolves around the evident need for systematic coordination and supervision in the institutional presidency." Because the staff numbers of the White House Office and other Executive Office of the President departments are so numerous and there are almost innumerable policies debated at all times, presidents must have a routinized or institutionalized way for organizing members of the administration and making decisions. Thus, regardless of the sociopolitical context or

the particular president, some scholars argue that administrations will be organized as hierarchies and decisions will be made in a standardized way through this hierarchical system.

Another example of literature that is characteristic of the institutional model (but which recognizes to some extent the idiosyncrasies of each president) includes studies in which comparisons are drawn between the organizational chart and atmosphere of each president. For example, in a discussion of feminist organizational structure in the Office of Women's Initiatives and Outreach, Norton and Morris (2003) pointed to the masculinist way in which presidential decision making has often been enacted and studied. They stated,

Bradley Patterson described the White House and the Executive Office of the President in terms of the "ring of power." President Eisenhower's organizational model of the White House is depicted as a "competent, machine-like football team, marching the policy field," with Kennedy's White House "a small fluid basketball team trying to create fast breaks" (Norton & Morris, 2003, p. 477).

This study criticized the prevailing wisdom of the functioning of the White House, but it also pointed out the similarities that have been drawn between presidential administrations. Although Norton and Morris show us that scholars recognize some variation in administration functioning within the institutional model, statements from this and other studies demonstrate the underlying assumption that each presidency will have an influential insider group. The group takes the form of the "ring of power" and may be thought of as a way for the top of the hierarchy to remove itself even further

from other members of the administration. The institutional pressures are such that presidents surround themselves with a highly influential team of advisers and decision-makers. Because the development of this “inner circle” happens in relatively predictable ways, the model remains constant rather than varying wildly among administrations.

Similar studies contribute further to institutional models of the presidency. In a review of relevant literature, Kessel (2001) noted the widely held position that “Nixon’s staff generally followed the Eisenhower pattern of a hierarchical structure” (p. 28). Walcott and Hult (2005) agreed and argued that post-Nixon, “Carter’s Republican successors maintained the same basic organizational model in their White Houses” (Walcott & Hult, 2005, p. 309). Hess also augmented this literature in his discussions of administrations that take the form of spokes of a wheel, a pyramid, or even a trapezoid. Again, these studies do show some variance in the organization of various administrations, but they also demonstrate the predictability of geometric, structural forms that are the result of the comparable institutional pressures felt by every president.

Conversely, the second model of presidential organization and decision-making argues that the “personal leadership style of each president is the key variable in decision-making” (Newmann, 2004, p. 273). Whereas the institutional approach sees the similarities across presidential administrations, the idiosyncratic (or “personalist”) approach recognizes that “one style of decision making does not fit all” (Newmann, 2004, p. 276). Instead, organizational structure and decision-making processes are argued to be the consequence of each president’s experiences, background, and personal preferences. This approach is evident in literature that examines and compares

presidents (the person) rather than *presidential administrations* (the thing). This is an important distinction because it views the person of the president, not institutional pressures, as the origin for organizational structure. This assumption is apparent in literature that examines specific presidents (see, for example, Sloan's 1990 analysis of President Eisenhower and Redford and Blissett's (1981) analysis of the Johnson presidency) as well as in research that compares presidents. For example, in an examination of several presidential administrations, Kessel (2001, p. 29) concluded that "President Carter brought a fixed style of executive leadership developed as governor of Georgia.... Carter saw himself as speaking for every man and therefore expected others to accept whatever recommendations he made." Reagan, according to Howard Baker, "'was a wonderful delegator and he would let people have wide latitude about how they carried out his policy'" (quoted in Kessel, 2001, p. 29). Finally, Leon Panetta stated that Clinton "loves to have a lot of people around and to discuss decisions endlessly" (Kessel, 2001, p. 30).

Much of the ongoing work of political scholar Stephen Hess also fits into this model. He argued for the idiosyncratic nature of organization when he stated, "The problem of the Nixon White House was not so much that it had a structured staff system, which had served Eisenhower well, but that the system was wrong for Richard Nixon" (Hess and Pfiffner, 2002, p. 189). The argument that there is an appropriate organizational pattern for each president is based in the assumption that personality, rather than institutional pressure, is the main determinant for how an administration may best be organized. This approach to the study of organization and decision-making,

then, accounts for personal management style, personal leadership style, and the consequences of those preferences (Newmann, 2001). This model recognizes that hierarchies—although perhaps appropriate for governmental agencies according to early contingency theories of organizational communication (see, for example, Grunig & Hunt, 1983)—may not be a “one size fits all” solution to the problem of organizing the presidency.

Just as the institutional model recognizes that there is variation among administrations, however, the idiosyncratic approach recognizes that “a certain amount of emulation and organizational memory” will affect organizational and decision-making processes and create some consistency between presidential administrations (Newmann, 2004, p. 276). Presidents rarely organize their administrations by dreaming up an entirely new structure. Instead, they may experiment with methods from previous administrations—particularly from past presidents who were of the same party—and find which style suits them best. The main difference between presidents is not the administration’s organizational structure, but rather the personal beliefs, strengths, and experiences that led to the choice of structure.

The institutional and idiosyncratic models have made significant contributions to the study of the presidency, but they are not free from critique. Their emphasis on organizational structure has given political scientists and political scholars permission to overlook the fact that “decision-making processes are by their nature dynamic and unstable” (Newmann, 2001, p. 92). The resultant models provide a description of presidential organizing that is inflexible and unable to depict the changes that often

occur through the life-course of an administration. As Hess (2002, p. 189) commented, “[organizational] schemas of political scientists, although pedagogically useful, do not truly reflect the world within the White House.” This becomes especially evident when we hear from political insiders themselves. In an interview with Donald Rumsfeld, Kumar (2000, quoted in Kessel, 2001, p. 28) revealed,

A “spokes of the wheel model seemed a natural for a Ford staff...” But Donald Rumsfeld, Ford’s new chief of staff, said he would not be a party to spokes of the wheel in the White House. Ford told Rumsfeld he agreed. “Look, I’ve announced it [but]...let a little time walk over it, and we’ll never operate that way.”

From these statements, we can see that organizational structure may not be the same throughout the duration of a presidency. Additionally, it is apparent that organizational patterns may be chosen because administrations need to portray an organized, rational process; not because they actually need to use (or do use) that process.

Newmann (2001) similarly argued that there are weaknesses in the traditional management models when applied to either the president or the presidency. He stated:

First, a number of scholars accept the notion that more than one management style can exist within a single administration at any given time. Others are even skeptical about the use of a classification scheme for decision-making styles.

Both of these points highlight a key weakness in these structural models of decision making. They are too static and do not account for evolution or change in the structure of decision making. (Newmann, 2001, p. 74)

Political scientist Andrew Rudalevige has explored problems with the literature as well, and he found similar weaknesses with the over-dependence on structure. He argued that “presidential management structures are presented as a simple trinity—hierarchical, collegial, or competitive. This is a useful simplifying framework. But such structures are not unitary facts” (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 337). By focusing on structure, Rudalevige (2005, p. 337) argued, scholars have produced organizational charts and “templates of presidential organization,” but “they have done less to theorize explicitly about how those varying organizations affect the flow of information to the president.” Typologies have been named and quadrants have been devised, but, as George Edwards (1981, p. 148) noted, there is little scientific evidence to support the claim “that the organization of the White House staff has any influence on presidential decision” or the quality of those decisions. What we have instead, as a result of the traditional models, is a plethora of “lessons learned” literature (e.g. Burke, 2001; March & Olson, 1983; Pfiffner, 1983; Seyb, 2001) or “planning for transition” literature (e.g. Kumar, Edwards, Pfiffner & Sullivan, 2000) that is prescriptive rather than analytical or critical. Because of these notable weaknesses, political science scholars have theorized about new models which will more accurately reflect the true organizational nature of presidential administrations.

New Models

Contemporary political scientists have recognized that institutional and idiosyncratic approaches are not sufficient to make arguments about either the decision-making process of administrations or administrations’ organizational structure. Rudalevige (2005, p. 336) drew attention to this and reminded scholars of the words of

Paul Quirk who, over 15 years ago, observed that “‘research on how presidents obtain and use information has not made notable advances beyond the casual theorizing of sophisticated participants’ and tends to consist of ‘conventional administrative doctrine modified by a few apparent lessons of recent presidencies.’” Several attempts have been made to remedy this oversight, as will be reviewed below, but there is still room for organizational communication scholars to contribute to this growing body of literature.

The first set of models which attempt to move beyond the shortcomings of the institutional and idiosyncratic models are those in which both traditional models are taken together to form a blended model. The attempt to combine the two traditional approaches may be either explicit or implicit, and the task has led to models that are in some ways responsive to the individual-system dualisms that are felt by all organizational leaders (Fairhurst, 2001). Leaders and presidents do not rely completely on their own personalities or the existing systems to structure White Houses and administrations, but rather feel the pull of both of these forces. The following models attempt to model this dialectic in the specific context of the presidency.

Joseph Pika (1988) is one scholar who explicitly undertook the project of unifying the two traditional models. He argued that institutional and personal forces come together in the relationship between two dimensions he calls the “president’s managerial assertiveness” and “staff cohesion.” This blend of organizational and idiosyncratic qualities leads to four patterns of presidential interaction as demonstrated by Figure 1 below. Pika stated that presidential demands are high in Pattern I, exemplified by the F.D. Roosevelt administration, but that the competition that occurs in

		Organizational Cohesion	
		High	Low
President's Drive to Control	High	IV	I
	Low	III	II

Figure 1: Interaction of Personal and Organizational Variables (Pika, 1988, p. 19)

a low-cohesive organization can be beneficial when controlled by the president. Without this control, as indicated in Pattern II, there is “full operation of divisive tendencies,” and the political administration is susceptible to failure (Pika, 1988, p. 21). Pika stated that the Carter administration is representative of Pattern II. Although the president is more removed in Pattern III, as was true of the Kennedy, Ford, Eisenhower, and Reagan administrations, the higher cohesion of the organization in general compensates for low presidential involvement, and Pika argues that Pattern III allows political considerations to “readily filter into the White House via the specialized staffs dealing with outside constituencies” (Pika, 1988, p. 21). Finally, under Pattern IV, the president exerts a high level of control over the organizational structures, but the outcomes of decision-making may not be as beneficial as under Pattern I. Pika (1988, p. 21) argued that the White House unity established in Pattern IV may lead to “insulation from political and policy

realities,” increases the chance that a “low-quality decision will be made,” and independent analysis of problems will be difficult in this pattern. He found that the Nixon and Johnson administrations both fall into this pattern. Through this analysis, Pika demonstrated the usefulness of the traditional theories in tandem rather than as two separate models of presidential administrations.

Other scholars, however, take a more implicit approach to the synthesis of the idiosyncratic and institutional models. In a discussion of organizational memory in the executive branch of government, Covington (1985) argued that there are both presidential and extra-presidential demands that contribute to the development of organizational memory. Specifically, he stated that new presidents are “predisposed to make changes in order to at least appear to start anew” (p. 175), but that this personal need for change (idiosyncrasy) is countered by the relative continuity in Executive Office of the President agencies (institutionalism). Covington (1985) argued that the stability of these extra-presidential demands serves to institutionalize these particular tasks and diminishes the president’s (new or old) ability to make sweeping changes of the organization. In essence, Covington argued that the idiosyncratic and institutional functions have a dialectical relationship and are present in every administration. Each exists in tension with and serves to moderate the other.

Other scholars who promote a blended approach to presidential organization and decision making do so by taking an information perspective. In this work, institutional and idiosyncratic approaches are implied in models that stress the amount and types of information forced through the organizational structure. Although these models (like

traditional institutional models) emphasize structure, they shift the focus from the study of structure itself to the influence structure can have on information at all levels of presidential administrations. Because of this emphasis, these models introduce a new level of sophistication to the study of presidential organizing when compared to traditional models. Three researchers who promote such a view are Andrew Rudalevige (2005), William Newmann (2001, 2004) and Martha Joynt Kumar (2001, 2003).

Rudalevige (2005) took an information perspective and argued for its importance to the study of the presidency. He quoted Witherspoon, who stated that “information is power because it is the substance of which decisions are made” and further argued that “information, at least in the modern presidency, is a function of staffing” (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 335). Here we see implications of the idiosyncratic model: information, the basis for all decisions, is a consequence of presidential staffing choices. Because presidents often choose different people for the job, we can expect that each president will receive dissimilar information on any policy under debate. This unique combination of people and data will lead presidents to make distinctive decisions.

Rudalevige further stated that one of the most important factors in presidential decision-making is advice from advisers, and presidents must get as much information from as many viewpoints as possible in order to make the best decision. Rudalevige (2005) argued that this could be done through staffing and structural choices. He hypothesized:

First, if different structures bring different types of information to the attention of the president, functionally based structures will give the president more useful

information than policy-specific structures. Second, multiple sources of competing information will give the president better information, though at some cost.... Third, drawing on the principal-agent literature, we should expect presidents will get better information about policy matters when they have (1) effective monitoring mechanisms; or (2) known elements of bias (preferably equivalent to the president's own, through the appointments process) along the information channels. (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 345-346)

In essence, Rudalevige (2005) argued for a system which produces more information that is representative of many viewpoints. In this way, presidents preserve the right to make decisions rather than let a lower-level official make a de facto decision by not presenting some piece of information to the president. As Rudalevige (2005, p. 342) stated, "The key question of institutional design, then, can be restated as one of designing a process by which desired information is forced through a hierarchy." From this explanation, it is clear that Rudalevige also promotes a version of the institutional model. Although presidents may draw their own conclusions, the information that leads to these conclusions is fostered through structures that are based on function rather than policy.

The key to this perspective, of course, is predetermining what types of information are desired or will be most useful. To help ensure that the proper information is available, presidents attempt to tie together structures from past administrations (e.g. existing communications units) with new structures that are created by the sitting president (e.g. the office of Homeland Security). In this way, both

institutionalized and idiosyncratic factors play a role in getting information to the president, and thus, to the decisions that are made in an administration.

Newmann specifically spoke of decisions relating to national security and the National Security Council, but his arguments can be generalized to apply to other areas of presidential decision-making. He argued that there are three structures that influence the decisions made by presidents:

the initial formal interagency structure; an informal structure in which the senior officials and the president operate within a truncated version of the NSC; and a confidence structure in which the president relies on one or two advisors more than any other. (Newmann, 2004, p. 277)

Additionally, Newmann (2004) pointed to three sources for decision-making structures: the political environment (political context), presidential choice (president's management and leadership styles, objectives and strategy), and organizational dynamics. This third category is a "catchall category" that accounts for the relationships between governmental officials and the president and is akin to Kumar's belief that presidents must come to rely on "knowledgeable insiders" in order to maximize both the organizing and decision-making capacity of a presidential administration. Newmann (2004, p. 273) argued, through an analysis of security decisions made by Carter, Reagan, and G. H. W. Bush, that although each of the decision-making structures is available to all presidents (they are institutionalized), "different presidents come to rely on different structures." This is what accounts for variance in decision-making between presidential administrations. His theory is an implicit attempt to merge the institutional and

idiosyncratic literatures, with an emphasis on information, into a unified picture of the executive branch of government.

Rudalevige, Newmann, and Kumar argued that many of these informational decision-making structures develop over time, but they also imply or directly stated that “both the formal and informal structures can be designed at the inception of an administration’s term in office” (Newmann, 2004, p. 299). Although formal structures are fairly easy to construct, informal structures that emerge from interaction are more difficult predetermine. Newmann, however, argued that informal structures develop in response to institutional pressures and stated that “because those institutional pressures are identifiable, the informal structure can be placed into the decision processes from day one of an administration’s term in office” (Newmann, 2004, p. 299). This would save presidents time and allow them to make more effective decisions from the first day of the presidency. The only component of the decision-making process that cannot be predetermined, in Newmann’s view, is confidence or trust among members, but he seemed to downplay this aspect of the organization until the conclusion of his argument. It is here that he invoked Kissinger’s statement, ““Presidents listen to advisors whose views they think they need, not to those who insist on a hearing because of the organization chart”” (Kissinger quoted in Newmann, 2004, p. 301). By planning for the formal and informal structures, however, presidents can immediately set to the important task of fostering confidence and trust in their relationships with other governmental officials. Kumar argued in a similar fashion, but she took a softer position on the issue of predetermining relationships. Instead of advocating that knowledgeable insiders be

“built into” the system, she argued instead that administrations can reduce the length of time it takes to “get organized” by learning from previous administrations. Again, what these researchers point to is a dialectical relationship between novelty or personal preference with the ease of adopting what has worked well in the past.

A second alternative to the traditional models is explicated by Karen Hult (2000), who offers ways in which presidents can increase their decision-making capacity. Similar to the models reviewed above, she argued for an information perspective to decision making, but she directly examined the process and the final product of decision making in addition to the structures relied upon in decision making. She argues that

Presidential decision capacity can be judged generally to have increased when decision making is (1) more representative (officials with relevant policy expertise, experience, or knowledge of likely political or policy effects participate in decision making), (2) more procedurally rational (decision makers explore divergent information and perspectives within the constraints of available time and cognitive capacities and are able to reach decisions closure), and (3) more accountable (decision makers are answerable to elected officials (the president and those in Congress) and, through them, to the voters). (Hult, 2000, p. 29)

To ensure that decision capacity (and thus policy effectiveness) is maximized, Hult (2000) recommended that specific changes occur in our national government. First, presidents should reduce openness to the public. According to Hult, this would help alleviate the negative reaction associated with the “Clinton administration’s excesses in

‘going public’” (Hult, 2000, p. 36). She additionally argued that congressional terms be increased to four years in the House and eight years in the Senate to allow officials to govern, rather than campaign, for longer periods of time in office.

Next, Hult (2000) argued that presidential openness to the executive branch should be increased. By escalating presidential access to career politicians, perhaps by signing them to a service contract and revolving them through the administration, important experiences and viewpoints would be added to the decision-making process. Hult (2000) further argued that aides should be allowed meaningful participation in relevant policy decisions.

Finally, Hult (2000) stated that changes in the structural design of the presidency would increase decision-making capacity. She especially emphasized collegial structures that approach decision-making in a way that minimizes conflict by bringing together and encouraging various points-of-view and/or relying on outside participants to mediate the process. Hult (2000, p. 39-40) argued, “Particularly as the stakes of a decision rise, more senior officials probably should be directly involved, the number of participants in any decision meeting should be relatively small, and group discussions typically should be in person.” By making these types of changes, Hult (2000) contends that decision-making capacity will improve across administrations.

In addition to the new models described above, scholars have made a case for approaching the study of the presidency as functioning within an administrative or neoadministrative state (Durant, 1991; Durant & Warber, 2001; Nathan, 1983). Some have also argued that the president in a neoadministrative state should hold quasi-market

approach to ideas based on the reinvention model (Lowery, 2000; Peters, 1996). What is unique about these models is that they take a systems approach to the presidency and propose alternatives to the hierarchical, bureaucratic way in which most administrations are organized. Just as the United States economy has become less production-oriented in favor of a service orientation, both the market and neoadministrative approaches take the stand that a large portion of the executive branch is dedicated to observing and monitoring organizations that pursue policy for them. Presidents no longer make policy, these scholars argue. Instead, they monitor the process of policy formation and make choices between policy options.

In the last few decades of the 20th century, scholars noted that presidents had begun to govern based on the principles of the administrative presidency. This model stated that presidents could expect congressional opposition to presidential policy to be the norm rather than an exception, and that presidents must confront this opposition aggressively. Finally, the administrative presidency argued that presidential appointees have an important role to play because they “can more readily evade congressional scrutiny or opposition and attenuate bureaucratic resistance by pursuing their policy goals administratively rather than statutorily” (Durant, 1991, p. 95). A contemporary example of the administrative presidency in action may be the recent controversy regarding Attorney General Gonzalez and the firing of eight United States attorneys. Gonzales was questioned in front of Congress regarding his knowledge of a plan to get rid of federal attorneys who were deemed to be “unfriendly” to the Bush administration. According to the administrative presidency, this type of “off-the-record” policy could be

accomplished more easily by a political appointee (Karl Rove or Alberto Gonzales) than by the president (Eggen & Kane, 2007).

In recent years, the administrative presidency has evolved with the observation that an increasingly large part of the executive branch (beyond simply the president) “no longer directly makes or implements policy” (Durant & Warber, 2001, p. 222). Instead, agencies of the executive branch “arrange, coordinate, and monitor networks of public, private, and nonprofit organizations that pursue these things with or for them” (Durant & Warber, 2001, p. 222). The result of this arrangement is a set of nonhierarchical and loosely coupled networks which each have more autonomy than they had in previous times. This second phase of the administrative presidency has been called a “neoadministrative state” and is basically an extension of the administrative state.

As previously observed, virtually all presidents try to make changes to the way in which the White House is run. Despite these repeated attempts at reform, however, the result is surprisingly similar across administrations: a “new version” of the old hierarchical system, leading many to believe that this is the only way in which our government may be organized. In contrast, David Lowery (2000, p. 95) argued that reinvention theory demonstrates the possibility for a new type of governmental system because it is “a theory stressing the advantages of systems of choice over systems of hierarchical command.” Under this quasi-market system, the bureaucracy itself generates policy ideas, and the president acts as a magistrate or judge who evaluates the policy options and chooses among them. Policy advisors and the president must also act as “policy systems custodians”—policy advisors to ensure that “all credible alternatives

receive a fair hearing from the president” (Lowery, 2000, p. 96) and the president to ensure that “real policy alternatives” are presented to him.

Lowery argued that there are several advantages to this type of system. First, he stated that “consumer sovereignty” will be enhanced. By this, Lowery (2000, p. 95) means that the president (the “consumer” in this case) would be able to make better decisions because he or she will select from a “menu of bureaucratically generated alternatives those that best secure his (sic) goals and objectives.” Second, under the quasi-market system advocated by reinvention theory, increased competition among bureaucratic agencies should lead to innovation and greater efficiency in policy generation. Finally, Lowery argued that market systems are more resistant to “catastrophic failure” because they recognize and operate within the limits of bounded rationality and substitutability.

In summary, there have been and continue to be many models that attempt to explain the functioning of the presidency in the United States. Whether the focus is on personality characteristics, organizational charts, or potential models for restructuring the executive branch, what is clear is that organizational theory and models of decision-making have relevance for political studies. Despite this link between the two fields of study, organizational communication theorists have yet to substantially study this connection to the detriment of communication scholars and political scientists. Through the addition of the communication voice to this project, the study of presidential administrations can be more thorough and complete.

Communication Critique

Each of the studies reviewed above made important contributions to the literature that bridges political science and organizational theory. There are several areas in the study of the presidency, however, where organizational communication scholars can add a fresh perspective to this project. Below I will review five general areas of critique.

One shortcoming of the existing literature is that many of the new models presume a rational process of decision making. Some, like Hult (2000) and Rudalevige (2005), directly stated that structures can be manipulated so as to ensure the most rational decisions possible. Redd (2005) instead implied the rational aspect of decision making in foreign policy decisions. He stated,

Typically, decisions to use force consist of a combination of factors: (1) decision makers must calculate the domestic political consequences of using force abroad, and (2) leaders must factor in military strategic considerations such as relative military capabilities, projected casualties, geography, etc. (Redd, 2005, p. 132)

We know, however, from political insiders, that this set of rational calculations does not always occur. In an analysis of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, Crotty (2003) drew from Bob Woodward's work on the Bush administration to make conclusions about the war on terrorism. He stated,

As Bush told it, as soon as he heard about the attack on the World Trade Towers, "I made up my mind at that moment we were going to war." He then pushed his circle of advisers to help him make good on his vow. (Crotty, 2003, p. 451-464)

Further, the decision to go to war with Iraq did not follow the most rational of processes.

Crotty tells us:

From the first, Cheney felt that Saddam Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attacks. Rumsfeld and his principal deputy, Paul D. Wolfowitz, a Hard Right ideologue and Bush appointee, had argued for military action against Iraq. In early meetings, Rumsfeld put the question: “Why shouldn’t we go against Iraq, not just al Qaeda?” (Crotty, 2003, p. 458).

From Crotty’s analysis, it is clear that in presidential administrations, as in most business organizations, rational decision-making processes do not always occur. As Crotty (2003, p. 460) concluded, “Bush’s war cabinet was not intended to make fundamental decisions; these had already been made. It was to strategize, develop in broad terms the plans to be used, set the timing, and decide the approach to potential coalition partners.” The decision was made *before* the calculations, plans, and strategies were developed, following Nutt’s construct of the “pet-idea” model of decision-making. In pet-idea model, executives “identified a problem that justified his or her idea and initiated a project” when “the time seemed ripe” (Nutt, 1984, p. 433). In the case of war with Iraq, Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz had been advocating war with Iraq since the 1990s. With the attack on the World Trade Center in September of 2001, the timing was ripe to broach the subject of a second Iraqi war. The conversations conducted by the cabinet, then, were not designed to calculate the costs and benefits of engaging in war or to make a decision regarding the United States’ post-September 11th strategy, but rather to determine how to *frame* the decisions that had already been made. In this sense,

presidential decision making can be seen as retrospective—the implications of which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Another direct appeal to rationality is exemplified by Rudalevige who provided advice to ensure that presidents will have the appropriate amount and type of information when making decisions. He stated that presidents should “choose subordinates with care, to ensure they share his values; and understand the bias of each and weigh it accordingly when considering their advice” (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 340). This partisan information can still be useful, Rudalevige (2005, p. 341) argued: “Even if staff members remain biased in some manner, knowing the direction and extent of the bias can still make their advice useful.” He cautioned that “‘rational’ here should be understood to mean simply ‘purposive,’” (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 378) but Rudalevige, as well as others, presumed that presidents make decisions by doing much research and considering and weighing the costs and the benefits of each particular decision they make. Crotty (2003) again informed us that this process is a vague exception rather than the rule; the opinions of advisers are not always carefully weighed or seen as valuable in presidential administrations. Speaking specifically of the George W. Bush administration, he stated:

Ideas and alternatives were not totally welcome in any area of the White House. Journalist and author David Frum, who served as a speechwriter (the “Axis of Evil” phrase was his most remembered contribution), in recounting his first days at the White House remarked on “the bias toward the ordinary” among presidential staffers.... “One seldom heard an unexpected thought in the Bush

White House or met someone who possessed unusual knowledge... conspicuous intelligence seemed actively unwelcome in the Bush White House” (Forum quoted in Crotty, 2003, p. 457).

We have strong evidence, then, that rational processes may be the ideal rather than the norm in presidential administrations. This presents a considerable obstacle to most—if not all—of the theories and models reviewed this far.

An off-shoot of this first weakness is that the president is often seen as the most rational of all the rational actors. Kessel (2001), for example, discussed the presidency and argued that staff members must be willing to adapt to the president. The reason for this, he stated, is that “presidents come to office as mature individuals. ‘They’re not in the formative stage of their life; they’re not figuring out how they’re going to do things’” (Roger Porter quoted in Kessel, 2001, p. 26). There is a clear contradiction here because staff members, who are presumably also mature individuals, must be the ones to demonstrate flexibility—even though it is not necessary for presidents to do so. It is as though the organization of the administration is predetermined by the president and all must bend to his (rational) will.

From a communication or rhetorical perspective, a second flaw in much of the political science literature on presidential organizing is that it overlooks the emergent, discursive nature of decision-making and organizing in favor of organizational structure. This becomes especially evident when we compare the emphasis on structure to the definitions of organizing and decision-making political scientists use in their analyses of presidential administrations. In his analysis of national security decision-making, Redd

(2005, p. 129) argued that “examining how advisers interact with one another, their status in the advisory group, and the manner in which presidents solicit information from advisers will further our understanding of how, when, and under what conditions national security-level decision makers make decisions.” Newmann (2004, p. 277) similarly stated, “The structure of decision making is defined here as the relationships between the senior officials and between those officials and the president.” The definition highlights the communicative nature of both organizing and decision-making, but most scholars outside of communication have not completely thought through the consequences of this definition. For example, Newmann (2001, p. 74; see also, Newmann, 2004) argued, “If structure is defined as the relationships between the president and his senior advisers and the relationships among the senior advisers, then the presidential management models can be seen as the way in which presidents order these relationship.” As previously mentioned, his research suggests that presidents can predetermine institutional pressures and create informal, relationship-based groups to deal with these pressures (manipulate the organizational dynamics) before the presidents enter office. This notion runs almost completely counter to the relational, emergent definition of structure and decision-making he described. Rudalevige (2005, p. 335) made a similar claim when he stated that the “president make prior decisions about how to structure his staff so that the right kind of information reaches him at the top of the pyramid.” He argued that interactions are “shaped by the organizational nature of the modern presidency” (Rudalevige, 2005, p. 336). I argue for the inverse instead—that, taken from a communication perspective, it is actually the *interactions* that shape the

organization. This reversal does not just acknowledge the relational nature of decision-making; it places emergence at the forefront of study. Similarly, Rudalevige's view also presumes that presidents can anticipate every type of situation they will face. If they must ensure that the right kind of information reaches their office, it assumes that they will know in advance what types of information are appropriate. Rudalevige, like others, argued for imposed structure as the solution to a problem of communication. Because organizations are truly the relationships among members, however, it may be more appropriate to let those relationships determine the organizational structure.

Structure is privileged in much of the political science literature, and it is clear that communication and rhetoric are given "second class status" in much of this research. Instead of being seen as essential and integrated into discussions of presidential organizing, communication instead is seen as simply a way to pass along information. This is especially true of those models that take an information perspective to examine the presidency, but it is true of other models as well. For example, Hess (2002, p. 178) briefly discussed communication in the context of bureaucracy and stated that when the

wishes of a president are passed along an extended chain of command, the message loses definition until, as in the children's game of 'Telephone,' the last relay (presumably to the person who must carry out the command) may bear little resemblance to the original message.

This type of language assumes a type of "magic bullet" or transmission model (Craig, 1999) in which messages are simply vehicles for commands which must reach a final

destination. Hess did, however, allow for a more sophisticated notion of communication when he made recommendations for the type of person appropriate for cabinet service. He argued that presidents should look, among other characteristics, for persuasiveness. He stated,

Especially necessary in large, hierarchical organizations where leaders have limited control over personnel and the tug of inertia may be considerable, persuasiveness requires the ability to create excitement about programs and proposals, as well as to argue quietly and effectively with legislators and important client groups. (Hess and Pfiffner, 2002, p. 195)

Hess argued, then, that cabinet members must be persuasive, but said nothing about the strategies that cabinet members should use, how they should craft their messages, or how the concept of being “on message” has rhetorical implications for presidents and their administrations. This is a very clear area where organizational communication and rhetoric scholars can make significant contributions to the literature.

A final critique of the literature is the inherent contradiction within the political science critiques themselves. Political scientists and scholars understand and admit that they are starting with a flawed system for analyzing the White House, but they continue to propagate this type of analysis. After critiquing geometric templates of organizing for their inability to reflect the reality of the White House, for example, Hess (2002, p. 189) stated, “But if one were to draw an organizational design, it might most resemble an isosceles trapezoid—a pyramid with its top chopped off.” Hess concluded with a model

that reflected the very aspects of presidential organization models that he has just critiqued.

Newmann (2001) found similar flaws in the political science literature. He stated, “Even with caveats from the authors of articles and books dealing with management styles about the limited utility of these models, they have become a standard shorthand for judging presidential decision making” (Newmann, 2001, p. 74). Despite this concern, however, Newmann’s (2001, p. 78-79) own analysis of decision making in several administrations started with this observation:

Carter, Reagan, and Bush had somewhat similar views of the way foreign policy decisions should be made. Each believed in a collegial process within which advisers could speak freely and debate issues while advising the president and talked of a strong secretary of state firmly in charge of U.S. policymaking.

He went on to demonstrate the differences between the administrations, but this did not solve the problems he pointed to earlier. It simply moves the conversation away from structural to idiosyncratic variables in presidential decision making.

Even scholars who advance the newest ideas of the executive branch find that research does not always reflect reality. As Durant and Warber (2001, p. 227) stated, “Perhaps the most striking finding of this first generation of research is the disjunction it reveals between the conventional approach that presidents have taken to the administrative presidency and what scholars, national commissions, foundation, and think tanks advise.” I argue that the way to address these recognized shortcomings in the literature is to bring in a new perspective—especially one that is communicatively based.

Perhaps what is missing from the research is what Crable has brought our attention to all along—not only do presidential administrations *look* like organizations, they *talk* like them, too. To make significant contributions to the literature, researchers must examine structure, but also the discourse that gives rise to structural elements and the rhetoric that is produced by those structures.

Weick's Theory of Organizing

The lens I will use in my research is the organizational theory of Karl Weick (1969, 1995, 2001). This theory is useful and appropriate for the analysis of rhetoric in the organizational system because it posits a definition of the organization that moves beyond the static, imposed system described by many scholars. Weick (2001, p. 5) succinctly defined organizations as follows: “Thus, I view organizations as collections of people trying to make sense of what is happening around them.” He specifically argued that organizations are constructed through patterns of relationship rather than locale or group membership, and this is important because political organizations are often based on such relationships. For example, Bush’s “war cabinet” is not a thing or a place (a literal cupboard) but rather a collection of people who interact with one another; they are defined by their relationship to the president and their involvement with war planning rather than by a particular location or formal appointment to such a cabinet. As political scientist Charles O. Jones (2005, p. 75) noted,

If a presidency is judged as a communications network, a good cabinet is one in which each appointee is sufficiently oriented to the White House and informed of

its goals to accomplish policy, administrative, and legislative tasks with clarity and confidence.

The success of a cabinet can be judged not on structure or how well members uphold a hierarchy, but on how well each member of the group is brought into the fold, so to speak.

Weick (2001, p. 7) also spoke to a second component highlighted by Jones—that of goal orientation. Weick stated that “organizations begin to materialize when rationales for commitment become articulated,” and he posited that there are three factors that must be in place in order for commitment to occur: “choice, an irreversible action, and public awareness of the action” (Weick, 2001, p. 6). This is particularly relevant for politicians who are, by definition, public figures. Almost from the start, they must be considered as “organizational members” because they have been elected by the public to change conditions that are necessarily public. If they fail to achieve these goals, they will most likely be replaced at the next available opportunity. What is revealed by several scholars above and must continue to be explored is that “organizational action is as much goal interpreted as it is goal directed, and the language of goals is indistinguishable from the language of justification” (Weick, 2001, p. 7). This definition highlights the role of goals as the focus of organizational action, and language and interpretation play central roles in the goals of the organization. In addition, because the language of goals is identical to the language of justification, the action of an organization is just as much retrospective as it is forward-looking. By looking at the language of goals and justifications, the locus of study becomes one that is

particularly relevant for organizational rhetoric scholars. The emphasis on goals again shows us that discourse is a central feature of organizations. Regardless of structure, communication defines the organization.

When we view organizations as communicative relationships among members rather than as structural entities, we may find that there is an “inner circle” of organizational members who play important roles in political organizing. These people may not necessarily be formal members of the administration and they therefore may appear to be relatively unimportant in previous discussions of “rings of power.” These influencers, however, have access to the president and therefore satisfy the Weickian notion of organizing rather than the traditional, managerial definition. For example, George W. Bush’s political adviser Karl Rove is not a member of the cabinet, but he is clearly a member of the “Bush Administration.” He has been able to parlay his access to President Bush and move from “campaign advisor” to a “policy advisor.” By taking a Weickian view of presidential organizing, researchers can gain new insights into these informal, yet important, relationships within a political administration.

Weick removed formal membership constraints in the study of organizations, and he similarly removed the spatial constraints as well. To provide an example relevant to my proposed study, the “Bush Administration” is not located anywhere – indeed members formally reside (or did reside) in various places in the White House, the Pentagon, Foggy Bottom, etc. What characterizes Bush, Cheney, Rove, Rumsfeld, and other members of the administration as an organization in the mind of the public is their seeming interconnectedness. The Weickian lens promotes the relational view of

organizing that has frequently been overlooked by scholars both in the fields of communication and political science.

Before delving too far into the application of Weick to presidential administrations, however, it is necessary to spend some time discussing the basis of Weick's theory and his views of the organization. Fundamentally, Weick (2001, p. 34) argued that organizations are "organized anarchies"; they are systems that have structure as a result of borders. This definition implies six themes which provide a model of the organization that is an alternative to highly rationalistic, bureaucratic models. First, Weick argued that in organizations, there is "less to rationality than meets the eye." He noted that since the 1980s scholars have doubted the importance of formal, logical rationality in the study of organizations and instead argued for a limited notion of rationality. Specifically, Weick (2001, p. 35) stated that rationality should be viewed "(1) as a set of prescriptions that change as the issue changes, (2) as a façade created to attract resources and legitimacy, and (3) as a postaction process used retrospectively to invent reasons for the action." From this definition, we see that rationality is a flexible, communicative act that happens after a decision has been made in order to justify that very decision, as well as to justify the need for additional resources—a consequence of identical language for goals and justifications. In other words, what is deemed to be a "rational" act may change as the situation changes. In the months preceding the war in Iraq, many people in the United States thought that it was very rational to preemptively attack a country that might possess weapons of mass destruction. Five years and counting into the war, however, citizens and leaders alike are arguing that formulating an

exit strategy is now the “rational” thing to do. Our notions of what is rational have changed.

The example of war in Iraq is also related to the second facet of rationality. As Weick (2001, p. 35) stated, “Organizations use rationality as a façade when they talk about goals, planning, intentions, and analysis, not because these practices necessarily work, but because people who supply resources believe that such practices work and indicate sound management.” Having determined the rational action for the war in Iraq, congressional representatives or the president may secure additional resources for the war effort. Even some Democratic leaders who have opposed the war since the very beginning have drawn upon this *topos*: having shown that an American exit strategy from Iraq is rational, Congress may feel secure allocating funds for this purpose. They are not providing to a goal-less enterprise, but may supply resources for a plan that is highly intentional and has a specific and calculated end-goal in mind—whether or not that goal is actually met.

Finally, the third characteristic of rationality is one in which it is viewed as a “post hoc rationalizing device” (Weick, 2001, p. 36). As Weick states, “First, action occurs, and then the ‘reasons’ why the action occurred are invented and inserted retrospectively into the organization’s history.” The war in Iraq may again provide us with insight into this dimension. As was previously discussed, the decision to invade Iraq was suggested before the reasons for doing so surfaced. The Bush administration provided U.S. and global citizens with many justifications for this action, but they were revealed after the decision to act had already been made. Indeed, the American public

was provided with several rationalizations for war with Iraq including unequal treatment of women and avoiding possible nuclear war, but the justification that seems to have “stuck” was that we were going to bring democracy to Iraq. This is not to say that democracy in Iraq is bad or negative. It is simply to say that this “motivation” was not highly promoted until after the decision to invade had already been made and it became clear that this was a reason that would be accepted by the U.S. public.

The second characteristic of Weick’s definition of organizations is that organizations are “segmented rather than monolithic” (Weick, 2001, p. 36). Weick argued that managers do not actually manage the organization. Instead, they “manage the process that manages the organization” (Weick, 2001, p. 36). Rather than a unified whole, organizations are collections of smaller segments that are responsible for the production of what we consider “the organization.” This has clear connections to observations made by scholars advocating administrative, neoadministrative, and reinvention political theories. As discussed earlier, these researchers noted that presidents do not write policy—they choose from a collection of policy options generated by segments of lobbyists, congressional representatives, and policy advisers. While these researchers may examine the structural implications of this idea (i.e. how to construct a quasi-market in ideas), a Weickian lens encourages us to examine how a segmented view of organizations shifts the discourse of those organizations and organizational segments.

Weick draws our attention to several factors that are related to the segmented notion of organizations. The first of these is that segments in organizations are both

small and stable. Weick stated that workers can expect to be uninterrupted for approximately nine minutes, that the most stable interactions often occur between two or three people, and that people can only concentrate on one thing at a time. This emphasis on “stable means small” extends to information. Weick (2001, p. 41) stated, “Given that managers do little reading, people who talk about managerial writing emphasize the necessity for brevity, as in the one-page memo, the one-page executive summary, the one unshakeable fact.” Given these insights, we must study the executive branch as segments and should strive to study those small, stable relationships that develop in any large organization. This is important because in times of organizational collapse or simply under group pressure, organizational members tend to retreat to their most stable form.

Not only must segments be small in order to be stable, but their connections to each other may vary in strength and be tightly and/or loosely coupled (Weick, 1969). Weick contended that there are four aspects of organizational life that influence the strength of connectivity: rules, agreement on rules, feedback, and attention. Segments become more tightly coupled as rules become more severe, numerous, clear, and as they provide less latitude to deviate. Tight coupling is similarly the result of a high level of agreement on what the rules state, what a violation of the rules entails, and how those violations will be dealt with. Finally, tighter coupling occurs with more immediate feedback and extended periods of attention. Although there are additional factors that affect the connectivity of segments, Weick (2001, p. 43) argued that “the point remains the same. An organization is neither entirely loose nor entirely tight.” There may be

little agreement on the rules and quick feedback. Or there may be much agreement on the rules, but no one paying attention to the process at hand. Whatever the combination, there will always be qualities of tight and loose coupling within organizations.

The result of this variability in connectivity is ambiguity. There are almost innumerable sources of organizational ambiguity, and Weick stressed the fact that ambiguity can never be completely removed. It is a permanent and normal part of the organizational environment. Ambiguity can, however, be reduced. This is important because we must find a world of know-how amidst the chaos. Without this, we would scarcely be able to function (Hyde, 2006). Weick proposed three important ways to reduce ambiguity or uncertainty: through the use of language, action, and interaction. He stated, “Words induce stable connections, establish stable entities to which people can orient (e.g. ‘gender gap’), bind people’s time to projects (‘Al, I’d like you to spend some time on this one’), and signify important information” (Weick, 2001, p. 49). Action can similarly replace variability with stability if it is “forceful, persistent, and confident” (Weick, 2001, p. 50). The final response to ambiguity discussed by Weick is to “turn to another person and, in common, build some idea of what is occurring” (Weick, 2001, p. 51). None of these steps will remove all ambiguity, but they can help reduce the ambiguity felt by organizational members to manageable levels. Without these mitigating efforts, organizations would surely collapse.

Weick’s concept of organizing is an improvement on approaches common to the political science literature because it more closely reflects the reality of organizational life. As several scholars have noted, organizational schemas and templates often do not

portray the White House accurately. Conversely, the Weickian definition allows one to be more selective, yet inclusive of informal influencers, when discussing presidential organizing. Hess, for example, views the “White House staff” as the organization in question—which includes over 1000 people. With Weick’s definition, we may include people who are not White House staff into our notion of the organization, and we may also exclude those who have little to no contact with the president or similarly high-ranking officials themselves. The emphasis on the relational component of organizing allows researchers to focus on those who play a central role in the administration rather than those who are defined through a specific bureaucratic role.

In this analysis, I propose to use several components of Weick’s theory to reveal facets of organizational rhetoric within the George W. Bush administration. Specifically, I draw on the concepts of the enacted environment, tightly coupled systems, and requisite variety to analyze several case studies taken from the administration. Each of these concepts are extensions or offshoots of the definition of organizing reviewed above, and each also makes clear connections to Crable’s insights into the fourth system of (organizational) rhetoric.

First, Weick’s theory of sensemaking advances the construct of the “enacted environment” which is itself a process and product of organizational rhetoric. In the traditional, managerial approach to organizational study, it is common to believe that organizations and organizational members react negatively to and attempt to control the environment and the changes within that environment. In this view, phenomena such as “conflict” and “uncertainty” must be removed or reduced as much as possible because

they are seen as outside forces that interfere with the daily business of the organization. Weick (2001, p. 179), however, argued that “organizations are more active in constructing the environments that impinge on them than is commonly recognized. That is, organizations often impose that which subsequently imposes on them.” Or perhaps more simply, “[P]eople often produce part of the environment they face” (1995, p. 30). As any good social constructivist would remind us when we feel constrained by our environment, through our actions we helped to create the constraining environment. Weick (1969, p. 64) stressed that “the human *creates* the environment in which the system then adapts. The human actor does not *react* to an environment, he [sic.] *enacts* it.” We cannot ever totally control the environment, but we exert significant influence over future enactments by the ways in which we interpret the organizational environment (Weick, 1995).

Weick drew upon such sources as Mead, Skinner, and Schutz in his discussion of the enacted environment, but especially on Piaget. Weick first argued that individuals must somehow process the large stream of data that they are constantly receiving. They accomplish this by “bracketing” or in some way unitizing data in order to eventually make sense of it. These individuals then begin to draw connections and posit relationships between the units and finally produce causal maps that explain the “world around them.” Through this process of bracketing and producing causal maps, however, the individuals have played a significant role in determining that world. By highlighting certain pieces of data over others and attributing cause to one event rather than another, the individuals have enacted an environment that then serves to constrain their

knowledge and their sensemaking activities in the future. As Weick (2001, p. 187) stated, “How enactment is done is what an organization will know.” Enacted environments are a product (“An enacted environment is the output from an episode of sensemaking, not the input to it”) that shape subsequent enactments (“Environments enacted on previous occasions can constrain contemporary enactment”) and, as a consequence, affect organizational decisions that are made (“The outcome comes before the decision...”) (Weick, 2001, p. 189).

Second, Weick’s concept of coupling offers the advantage of describing organizational form in a way that posits actual implications on rhetoric and behavior. Instead of describing the particular participants involved in the creation of organizational rhetoric or describing organizations in static, geometric terms, Weick argued that participation in and acceptance of the enacted environment will cause organizations to be either more tightly or loosely coupled. As explained above, these terms are used to describe the level of interconnectivity between members of the groups and organizational segments, and each has its advantages and disadvantages. Because loosely coupled systems have been discussed at much greater length by Weick and other researchers, I will start with their definition and description.

Weick defined “loose coupling as a situation in which elements are responsive, but retain evidence of separateness and identity” (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 203). He then extended this definition: “Loose coupling is evident when elements affect each other ‘suddenly (rather than constantly), negligibly (rather than significantly), indirectly (rather than directly), and eventually (rather than immediately)’” (Orton & Weick, 1990,

p. 203-204). Loosely coupled systems are organizations in which members can minimally and indirectly influence each other at specific times. Although this may seem like a negative situation rather than a positive, Weick explicated loose coupling's pros and cons. He stated,

Actors in a loosely coupled system rely on trust and presumptions, are often isolated, find social comparison difficult, have no one to borrow from, seldom imitate, suffer pluralistic ignorance, maintain discretion, improvise, and have less hubris because they know the universe is not sufficiently connected to make widespread change possible. (Weick, 2001, p. 44)

Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to this type of system.

Weick (2001, p. 44) particularly argued that loosely coupled systems are a “solution to constant environmental change.” Because of their loose connections, loosely coupled systems accept and can adapt to the inability to know exactly what another member thinks and to the limits of information gathering and processing. Although not closely connected to each other, individuals who find themselves in loosely coupled systems can use their flexibility and adaptability to their advantage.

Because tightly coupled systems are loosely coupled systems' inverse, we can assume that they affect each other constantly (rather than suddenly), significantly (rather than negligibly), directly (rather than indirectly), and immediately (rather than eventually). These groups demonstrate a higher level of interconnectivity and immediacy than loosely coupled systems, but they also have their downfalls. As Weick stated, a tightly coupled system has “considerable inertia. That means it would be hard

to interrupt the projects of such a system. Nevertheless, precisely because those projects are so well organized, an interruption that cannot be quickly repaired should be devastating” (Weick, 2001, p. 80). Not only *can* devastating problems occur, Weick cited Perrow’s study of nuclear power plants to demonstrate that problems can be *expected* to occur. He stated, “Because these systems are tightly coupled and involve complex transformation processes, unexpected sequences of events are commonplace” (Weick, 2001, p. 81) and are called “normal” accidents. This is doubly problematic because one cannot always determine which accidents are normal and which are not until after the accident has been resolved. These systems are able to respond quickly, but this is a necessity as the direct and immediate influence of one part on another demands quick action.

Finally, Weick used the concept of connectivity to make arguments about the ways in which organizations respond to equivocal situations. Weick (2001, p. 251) stated that “equivocality is the extent to which data are unclear and suggest multiple interpretations about the environment.” He further argued that “organizing is directed toward removing equivocality from the informational environment” (Weick, 1969, p. 40). In other words, organizations are formed when groups attempt to reduce uncertainty in the stream of data they are constantly sensing. As they enact the environment, they posit causal relationships between units of these data and attempt to make sense of them. When the organizational members encounter a situation in which several possible outcomes may occur, they are faced with an equivocal situation. They then come together (organize) to help reduce this level of ambiguity. As Weick stated,

Organizing serves to narrow the range of possibilities, to reduce the number of “might occurs.” The activities of organizing are directed toward the establishment of a workable level of certainty. An organization attempts to transform equivocal information into a degree of unequivocality with which it can work and to which it is accustomed. (Weick, 1969, p. 40)

Organizations form to reduce equivocality, and as Weick (2001, p. 252) stated, “Equivocality is reduced through shared observations and discussion until a common grammar and course of action can be agreed upon.” What organizational members must remember, however, is that “it takes equivocality to remove equivocality” (Weick, 1969, p. 40). Here, Weick refers to Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety in which “no sensing device can control input that is more complicated than the sensing device” (Weick, 2001, p. 50). In other words, the solution to a problem must be as simple or as complex as the problem it attempts to solve.

As one can conclude from the above descriptions, the ways in which organizations are connected to one another, the problems and uncertainty they face, and how they interpret the world around them can be linked to the rhetoric they do and will produce. To help explore more fully the link between political and organizational rhetoric, I will draw on three cases from the George W. Bush presidency that each contribute to our understanding of sensemaking in the fourth system of rhetoric. Specifically, I will discuss the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system, the debate over embryonic stem cells as indicative of the constraining nature of the enacted environment, and the Social Security reform as it reveals the battle with equivocality and

requisite variety. In order to set the stage for arguments about policy decisions, I first look in the next chapter to the available evidence to argue for the administration as a more tightly than loosely coupled system.

CHAPTER III

A TIGHTLY COUPLED (WAR) CABINET

Presidential administrations undoubtedly demonstrate organizational characteristics, as reviewed earlier, often in a bureaucratic form in which the president makes decisions with advice and guidance from key advisers. What much of the existing literature has overlooked or blatantly denied, however, is that advisers play a key role in shaping the information that reaches the president. This, consequently, may influence the way the president sees the world and the decisions that he¹ reaches. As Redd (2005, p. 130) simply stated, “Advisers can have a profound impact on foreign policy decisions,” and the way to gain a thorough understanding of national security decision-making is to examine “how advisers interact with one another, their status in the advisory group, and the manner in which presidents solicit information from advisors” (Redd, 2005, p. 129). This is especially true of Bush and his administration. Mann (2004, p. xviii) stated, “Because Bush’s prior experience was so limited, he was obliged to rely to an extraordinary extent on his advisers for ideas and for information.” Bush, by far the most inexperienced member of the administration in the area of foreign policy, functioned as a decision-maker, but he only decided from those options presented to him by cabinet members and advisers. This speaks to the importance of advisers in administrations in general, but in the Bush administration in particular.

Rudalevige posed similar questions. He asked, “What, and what kind of, information reaches presidents, of the nearly infinite amount this in prospect might do

so? And how does this affect the ways decisions are conceived, and taken?”

(Rudalevige, 2005, p. 335) While these questions and statements speak to the importance of Weick’s conceptualization of the enacted environment (see Chapter II and Chapter IV for further explication), the fact that advisors can and do directly influence the flow and content of information on which presidential decisions are made also speaks to the notion of the presidential administration as a tightly coupled system. Before delving too far into the argument, I will first provide background on the concept of system coupling and review case studies that demonstrate how this concept has been used in academic scholarship.

System Coupling

The concept of system coupling has been used to examine such various case studies as the construction industry (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), the criminal justice system (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979), nuclear submarines (Bierly & Spender, 1995), nuclear power facilities (Perrow, 1984), and airports (Weick, 2001). Loose coupling in particular has also been the subject of theoretical modeling of knowledge management in technology production firms (Brusconi & Prencipe, 2001), interdisciplinary team training in health care teams (Koff, DeFries & Witzke, 1994), and as a potential linking pin between Normal Accidents Theory and High Reliability Theory (Rijpma, 1997). The theoretical concept of system coupling is probably most known, however, for its application to educational organization. Weick’s work has stimulated a cadre of scholars who have analyzed the meaning and implications of loose coupling in our education system (see, for example, Fusarelli, 2002; Lutz, 1982; Pajak & Green, 2003).

In his seminal 1976 article, Weick (p. 3) argued that in loosely coupled systems, “coupled events are responsive, *but* that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness.” From this statement it is evident that there are two factors that affect coupling: responsiveness and separateness. Without any connection or distinctiveness, the elements do not form a system, and the degree to which elements are connected and yet distinct determines whether or not the system is loosely coupled. Orton and Weick (1990, p. 205) gave a more thorough definition of this concept:

If there is neither responsiveness nor distinctiveness, the system is not really a system, and it can be defined as a noncoupled system. If there is responsiveness without distinctiveness, the system is tightly coupled. If there is distinctiveness without responsiveness, the system is decoupled. If there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness, the system is loosely coupled.

Weick argued that in educational organizations, for example, principals and counselors may be connected by their employment at the same school and by their shared goals for education in general and their students in particular, and yet each may have independence in their roles at the school, leading them to be defined as members of a loosely coupled system.

The organizational structure and activities of loosely coupled systems have both advantages and disadvantages. Loosely coupled systems are able to persist through times of change, but there is no guarantee that what persists is a positive or useful component or characteristic of the system. Loosely coupled systems are more adept at

sensing change and are good for implementing localized change, but they may be unable to effect large-scale change throughout the organization. In addition, loosely coupled systems may be able to adapt to a wider range of environmental changes, they can seal off and contain breakdowns, they provide greater levels of self-determination, and they are less expensive to run than tightly coupled systems. With tightly coupled systems, we can expect the opposite. There is no guarantee that they will persist; they cannot cordon off small failures which may lead the system to collapse. They can, however, implement large changes at the system level because each member can directly influence the others.

Several years after his analysis of educational organizations as loosely coupled systems, Weick expanded his definition of loosely coupled systems and moved the emphasis of the definition from one of description (nouns) to action (adverbs). To that end, he stated (2001, p. 383), “Loose coupling exists if A affects B (1) suddenly (rather than continuously), (2) occasionally (rather than constantly), (3) negligibly (rather than significantly), (4) indirectly (rather than directly), and (5) eventually (rather than immediately).” This definition also speaks to the advantages and disadvantages mentioned above, with particular emphasis on the ability for a loosely coupled system to cordon off or buffer itself from small problems before they turn into full-scale crises—something tightly coupled systems can expect as part of their normal environment (see Perrow, 1984 for more information on normal accidents).

Because of these apparent advantages, much was made of Weick’s classification of the educational system as loosely coupled. In recent years, however, scholars have come to question the true benefits of this metaphor, mostly due to the difficulty of

effecting substantial change in loosely coupled systems. Because elements or actors in a loosely coupled system only influence one another indirectly and negligibly, any adaptation made by the system must by definition be local. As Weick (2001, p. 390) stated, “Change diffuses slowly, if at all, through such systems, which means that components either invent their own solutions—which may be inefficient compared with other solutions available in the system—or they die.”

Weick did, however, suggest specific ways to introduce change into loosely coupled systems. First, leaders may introduce doubt into the systems and shake members’ belief in the logic of the system. As Weick (2001, p. 391) stated, if fundamental “beliefs are questioned, action stops, uncertainty is substantial, and receptiveness to change is high.” Second, elements of loosely coupled systems may be socialized in ways that promote both generality and accuracy. Weick (2001, p. 395) argued that a “mixture of indoctrination in key values plus training the management of discretion and improvisation seems most appropriate to preserve the flexibility of a loosely coupled system but to stabilize that flexibility in terms of a handful of central values.” In essence, system elements must be introduced to the realities of loosely coupled systems but also be given resources that allow them to react and adjust to the inevitable changes in those realities. Third, change may be propagated across a loosely coupled system by taking advantage of differential participation. In loosely coupled systems, some members are always more connected to a topic than others. To ensure new voices are heard and bring those who are less involved back into the fold, Weick (2001, p. 396) suggested that change agents

pay special attention to absentee members, latecomers, and regular attendees and then... introduce topics on which infrequent participants have unique and visible expertise, change meetings times, or any other devices that introduce a new pattern of differential participation and a new pattern of concerns and expertise.

Fourth, change may need to be introduced into loosely coupled systems because some variables become constant and freeze other variables around them. Weick (2001, p. 398) stated that this could be fought by

widening the tolerance limits of the constant variable, introducing lower standards of performance, circumventing the constant variable by introducing new linkages into the system, reversing the direction in which either the constant variable or related variables have been moving, institutionalizing and legitimatizing the separate severed systems while ignoring the original system, stressing the constant variable even more until the whole system explodes and forms new systems, and declaring a moratorium in the hope that relief from pressure will restore variation.

Whichever strategy is chosen, the goal is to move, subvert, or destroy the constant variables. Finally, Weick suggested that loosely coupled systems frequently survive with minimal feedback because the feedback they do receive is meaningless or inaccurate. Change agents, then, must attempt to reform loosely coupled systems without the use of feedback (modeling, role playing, etc.) or by presenting accurate and relevant feedback.

Other scholars have considered additional modifications to the theory of system coupling. For example, Spender and Grinyer (1995) argued that system coupling is revealed through the dynamics of the organizations rather than in its structural relations. They stated that systems that are tightly coupled experience punctuated change when compared to the gradual change associated with loosely coupled systems. The role of top management in a loosely coupled system, then, is to

generate and institutionalize the constant self-questioning which can facilitate smooth rather than punctuated change, to create a system-wide learning environment rather than a specific body of second order knowledge which they then deliver to the domain of the first order change, i.e., the managed parts of the organization. (Spender & Grinyer, 1995, p. 913)

Top management does not “give” knowledge to lower-level managers in loosely coupled systems. Instead, they must cultivate an environment in which knowledge creation and generation are the norm.

There is a fine line, however, because as several scholars have emphasized (see, for example, Orton & Weick, 1990; Spender & Grinyer, 1995; & Spender & Grinyer, 1996),

when the system is too open to be a loosely coupled system, it becomes unmindful and thereby decoupled from effective, satisfying, adaptive, buffering, and persistent (purposive) action. On the other hand, when the system is too closed, it becomes decoupled from effective, satisfying, adaptive, buffering, and persistent action because its activity becomes unworldly, purpose-less, and

detached from its context. Top management can fail either way. (Spender & Grinyer, 1995, p. 917)

Perhaps due to the importance of each member of a system, Beekun and Glick (2001) argued that loose coupling should be developed as a “scientific rather than literary metaphor” to emphasize the predictive power and connotative descriptions of the theory. The researchers posited that network analysis is a way to make system coupling more useful in a scientific sense, and network analysis is often a fruitful approach to the study of systems. I argue, however, that network analysis should augment, rather than replace, the literary studies of loose coupling. In addition, organizational scholars can enhance the study of system coupling by focusing on the rhetorical inputs and outputs inherent in the activities and dynamics of systems, whether loosely or tightly coupled. In this way, scholarship will help us achieve a richer, more holistic understanding of organizations and be mindful of Crable’s (1990) call to define organizations rhetorically and rhetoric organizationally.

Method

In the remainder of this chapter, I draw upon the above literature to argue for the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system. To do this, I will undoubtedly make arguments about an administration to which I have no access. Although this could be seen as highly problematic to some scholars (especially those who advocate a scientific network analysis approach to the study of system coupling), it should not be seen as a fatal blow to my project. Indeed, we often make arguments about that which we have not observed firsthand (the inferred properties of atoms and their sub-particles come to

mind), and scholars and researchers in the field of “political studies”—whether based in rhetoric, political science, or political communication—have faced and overcome this problem before. Take, for example, Steven Redd, whose work I have quoted several times in the project thus far. He provided a strong rationale for his study of the Clinton administration—an administration to which he did not have personal access and for information on which he relied on sources similar to my own. His justification is lengthy, but because of its direct relation to the project at hand, it is worth quoting completely. He stated (2005, p. 132),

Because the Clinton administration just recently left office, any records needed to answer [my] key questions will be classified. Moreover, any such records are very likely to remain classified in the near future. The only sources available are documents such as transcripts of public speeches, press conferences, press releases, etc. These sources tend to be more journalistic in nature and some are not first-hand accounts of the events that transpired.... However, even with these constraints, I believe that the numerous sources I accessed and present as evidence in this paper corroborate each other, thereby strengthening the veracity of the assumptions and conclusions I make.

I similarly must rely on journalistic reports of the Bush administration, transcripts of speeches and press conferences, and books published about the administration. Like Redd, however, I believe that the triangulation of arguments through as many sources as possible has led me to craft my arguments in a sophisticated and responsible manner.

My project, however, is made especially difficult because of the Bush administration's lack of public record. As Crotty stated in 2003 (p. 456),

From the available media and other accounts, the Bush administration is notable for its extreme secrecy and its caution in dealing with the press and the public. Just two years into its term, it is clear that policymaking in the Bush White House is a closed process, limited to a handful of selected advisors who, whatever their skills and knowledge, were selected primarily for their loyalty to the President. Loyalty, secrecy, and closed decision making appear to be catchwords of the Bush administration.

Bush reinforced this notion through his words in a 2001 Camp David speech with Colin Powell and former Attorney General John Ashcroft. The President stated, "This is an administration that will not talk about how we gather intelligence, how we know what we're going to do, nor what our plans are." (Bush, 2001c). While this compounds the difficulty of making specific arguments about the Bush administration, these comments do help support the notion of the Bush administration as a highly insular system—information neither exits nor enters. My main source of information regarding the inner working of the administration, then, had to come from those who do have privileged access to the administration, preeminent among whom is Bob Woodward. His numerous interviews with a wide variety of officials, in combination with his access to anonymous sources, make his work vital to this project. While certainly not a "best case" scenario for gathering information, use of Woodward's work is not unprecedented in academia. Political scientist John Burke (2005) made similarly extensive use of Woodward and his

unparalleled access to the Bush administration to argue for Condoleezza Rice's role as broker in the inner circle of administration members.

Finally, Orton and Weick (1990, p. 204) stated that they were "disappointed to find that the concept [of system coupling] has been applied to simpler organizational puzzles than originally intended." The project at hand cannot be accused of this deficiency. With the appropriate caveats, rationales, and precautions in place, I now turn to the arguments for the administration as a tightly coupled system.

The Tightly Coupled Bush Administration

The Players

The first step in the argument for the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system is to identify who is meant by the phrase "Bush administration." In many presidencies, the term administration refers to the president, vice president, and cabinet-level members who head each of 15 departments. This is not the case for the Bush administration. The events of September 11, 2001 solidified one subgroup of cabinet members who would become the center of power in the executive branch. The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. determined the focus and the path of the administration: The Bush administration is a war administration. That is their defining characteristic. As Woodward (2004, p. 256) stated, the full cabinet "was not the group that would make important decisions on war." To that end, there are several actors who have played and continue to play influential roles in the administration. They include the president and vice president as they are the elected faces of the administration. Interestingly, however, Bush made sure that he was

to be seen as the legitimate leader of the war cabinet. Woodward (2002, p. 37-38) stated,

On the morning of Wednesday, September 12, Cheney had a moment alone with Bush. Should someone chair a kind of war cabinet for you of the principals? We'll develop options and report to you. It might streamline decision making. No, Bush said, I'm going to do that, run the meetings. This was a commander in chief function—it could not be delegated. He also wanted to send the signal that it was he who was calling the shots, that he had the team in harness.

With Bush as leader, Crotty (2003, p. 456) informed us that the other important players included Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, CIA Director George Tenet, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and Chief of Staff Andy Card. Because of the CIA's function of gathering intelligence about the 9/11 hijackers, al Qaeda, and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Tenet was a key figure in the lead-up to the war in Iraq. Colin Powell was charged with communicating the administration's plans and securing support from other nations around the world. At the National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice was placed in a leadership role for the Iraqi post-war reconstruction plans. Donald Rumsfeld, as the director of defense and leader of the uniformed military, was assigned the task of planning for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, placing him at the intersection of all other departments. Andy Card lent both support services and leadership to discussions about the war on terrorism. Finally, Stephen Hadley could also be easily included in the group, as he was Condoleezza Rice's deputy during the first administration and filled her position at the

NSC after she became Secretary of State. Many of these officials were also members of the “Vulcans,” the name that Bush’s foreign policy advisers used to describe themselves during the 2000 campaign (Mann, 2004). This group, comprised of Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, Richard Armitage, Paul Wolfowitz and others, is notable because they had all worked on foreign policy in previous Republican administrations and were reunited in the first term of George W. Bush’s presidency. This, then, comprises the cast of characters.

Responsiveness without Distinctiveness

As previously discussed one of the most basic ways to judge a system is to examine its degrees of responsiveness and identity. If elements of the system are neither responsive nor distinct, the elements form a “noncoupled system”—which in fact is not a system at all. If the elements are responsive without being distinct, the system is tightly coupled. If the elements are distinct without being responsive, the system is decoupled. If, however, the elements are both distinct and responsive, the system is loosely coupled (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 205). Based on this classification, we have evidence that the Bush administration behaves as a tightly coupled system in both general and specific ways.

The fledgling Bush administration had a past that provided a foundation for tight coupling. As Mann (2004, p. x) stated, “Most of its members had already worked closely alongside one another in previous administrations, and the ties among them were close, intricate and overlapping.” Rumsfeld and Cheney had worked together in the Nixon administration—in fact, Rumsfeld hired Cheney to be his aide. During the

George H. W. Bush administration, then-defense secretary Cheney chose Colin Powell to be the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mann (2004, p. x-xi) argued that these Vulcans “had a long history, a collective memory” to which Bush and Rice, the youngest members of the administration, were not immune. According to Mann (2004, p. xi), the two “possessed extraordinarily close ties to this legacy of the past;” Bush because his father had been president, and Rice because she coordinated U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union during the father’s administration. Even deputies and aides to war cabinet members were recruited from the “ranks of the faithful,” (Mann, 2004, p. xi) many having attended college together or serving together in previous administrations. With all of these pre-existing connections, it is no wonder that the Bush administration was primed to be one that demonstrated tight coupling.

One of the ways in which the Bush administration specifically demonstrated their responsiveness and downplayed their distinctiveness was through their attempts to coordinate a “message of the day.” As the founders of the website *Spinsanity*, a nonpartisan webpage devoted to “debunking” claims made by political leaders, found, the White House Communications Office wanted to give the press one thing to cover each day. They stated,

As *Washington Post* White House correspondent Dana Milbank said, the administration develops ‘talking points that they email to friends and everyone says exactly the same thing. You go through the effort of getting Karl Rove on the phone and he’ll say exactly the same thing as Scott McClellan.’ Such

monomaniacal devotion to the official message gives the White House press corps little else to report. (Fritz, Keefer & Nyhan, 2004, p. 24)

As former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card summarized it, “I make sure our communications team is not just a team in the White House. It is a communications team for the executive branch of the government” (quoted in Fritz et al, 2004, p. 21). This tactic has become increasingly prescient for politics in general over the last few decades. With campaigns conducted nearly year-round, presidents, their appointees, and their advisors strive to stay “on message” and present a unified voice across people and time. This characteristic of contemporary politics and its practice in the George W. Bush administration speak to an inherent tight coupling in the executive branch.

While concept of being “on message” portrays the unity of the information that came out of the White House, there is evidence that the internal workings of the administration were similarly uniform. In an interview with Bob Woodward (2002, p. 144) President Bush stated, “One of my jobs is to be provocative, seriously, to provoke people into—to force decisions, and to make sure it’s clear in everybody’s mind where we’re headed.” The phrasing of this statement reveals that Bush sees his role not to entertain options, but rather to remind everyone “where we’re headed”; in essence, to take out the uniqueness in order to preserve unity. Generally this has been an effective tactic, but, as with perhaps every system, there was one person who was more difficult to lead than others: former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. According to Woodward (2006, p. 182), “Card found he could pretty much call the other cabinet secretaries—Powell, for example, and get them to play ball and carry out presidential

orders and requests. But not Donald Rumsfeld.” Despite this potential “loose cannon,” Jay Garner, head of an Iraqi post-war office, found that all members of the administration who had direct responsibility for the pre-, during-, and post-war activities in Iraq (including Rumsfeld) held a similar view of reality. He told Woodward (2006, p. 126), ““As the troops said, they drank the Kool-Aid.”” This indicates that although Rumsfeld might not always “play ball,” the range of behaviors that constitute the game had been significantly decreased. It also speaks to the notion that responsiveness and unity were highly prized by the administration; members as a group were expected to follow the demands and requests of the president.

The press corps at large also picked up on the responsiveness-without-distinctiveness of the Bush administration. After the election of George W. Bush to his second term as president, the typical “cabinet shakeup” began, including the resignation of Colin Powell as Secretary of State. This event, more than any other, caused considerable speculation and reflection on the type of organization demonstrated by the Bush administration. The overwhelming theme running through the media was that the administration was losing its only “moderate” voice with the departure of Powell. The remaining members were described as all alike in thought and political ideology. As evidence for these claims, I examined news transcripts from television and radio, as well as newspaper articles from November 16 and 17, 2004. These dates were particularly relevant because Colin Powell announced his resignation on November 15, and Condoleezza Rice was immediately named as the candidate to be his successor the following day. This announcement caused a flurry of activity on television and radio on

November 16, but most newspapers discussed the Powell-Rice difference the following day, November 17, 2004. These two dates, then, provided the largest sample of text to analyze (literally hundreds of articles and transcripts) and were read for their major themes.

By far, the majority of the texts depicted the Bush administration as a system that does not demonstrate distinctiveness among members. As NPR radio host Tavis Smiley (2004) asked, “What happens now in the second term when there’s nobody in the administration that has a different point of view?” This sentiment was echoed by Terry Moran (2004) of *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* who stated, “The nomination of Rice cements a foreign policy team that now, with the departure of Colin Powell, an occasional dissenter in the ranks, will be stocked with staunch supporters of the president’s policies.” Further, added David Gergen (2004) of *CNN American Morning*,

The voices inside the administration who wanted to take [U.S. foreign policy] more toward the diplomatic, multilateral, cooperative view toward other nations and other—such as the Europeans—those voices are now being silenced in the administration. And it will be a much more uniformly conservative administration.

Newspaper reporters in the U.S. picked up on this thread, as the *Boston Globe* (Stockman, 2004, p. A1) reported, “The impending departure of Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, with the mutual consent of President Bush, signals the final fadeout of the leading moderate voice on the Bush administration’s foreign policy team.” The U.S.’s closest ally, the United Kingdom., voiced a similar statement in *The Guardian*, London’s

most widely circulated newspaper. With somewhat stronger language, the paper declared that the “Bush administration was stripped of its last dissenting voice of moderation yesterday when the secretary of state, Colin Powell, resigned and Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser who is known for her conservative instincts, was lined up to replace him” (Goldenberg, 2004, p. 1).

These quotations are representative of hundreds of others that were present in television and radio broadcasts, U.S. newspapers, and newspapers from around the world. In fact, the uniformity of the administration in a “post-Powell” world was noted in major papers from England, Australia, Israel, and China. Virtually all media coverage of the event claimed that Powell, the last moderate hold-out, was being replaced by someone who can finish Bush’s sentences (Purdum, 2004, p. A1), and “has been engaged in what friends call a ‘mind meld’ with Mr. Bush” (Bumiller, 2004, p. A1). It is important to note here that I am not arguing that the change from Powell to Rice actually had any impact on the administration’s ideologies. Rather, this evidence points to the responsiveness-distinctiveness tension present in all systems. Clearly, media from around the world viewed the Bush administration to be responsive to one another while demonstrating extremely low levels of distinctiveness.

According to Weick, there are advantages and disadvantages to systems that are responsive but do not display distinctiveness. One significant trade-off that occurs is between adaptation and adaptability and is often described in terms of flexibility and stability. Flexibility is a hallmark of loosely coupled systems, and it is important because it allows an organization to “modify current practices so that nontransient

changes in the environment can be adapted to” (Weick, 2001, p. 388). Too much flexibility, however, makes it virtually impossible for organizations to continue or to have an identity. The opposite is true of the stability found in tightly coupled systems: stability allows for a certain amount of regularity in the organization, but “total adherence to past wisdom would be disruptive... because more economical ways of responding would never be discovered and new environmental features would seldom be noticed” (Weick, 2001, p. 388). In other words, flexibility allows for creative solutions to problems, but may impede organizational consistency. Stability recognizes patterns that can facilitate decision-making, but it also makes an organization highly susceptible to groupthink.

Based on the stability demonstrated by tightly-coupled systems, we can expect that the Bush administration (with Rice as Secretary of State) would be praised in the media for its continuity but questioned for its lack of new or dissenting ideas. Indeed, these are the themes that the media highlighted. The strong level of connection between members of the administration was spoken of frequently, often in glowing terms. For example, the *Christian Science Monitor* (LaFranchi, 2004, p. 2) stated that Rice’s nomination and appointment “means foreign leaders working with Rice will know they have someone who has the president’s ear,” and Israel’s *Jerusalem Post* (Keinon, 2004, p. 1) declared that the “appointments ensure continuity in Bush’s policy.” Most pointedly, the *Toronto Star* (Gwyn, 2004, p. A25) commented, “As America’s top diplomat Rice, thus, will have one significant advantage over Powell. Whenever she speaks, the world will know that it is Bush speaking.” Not only do these sentiments

stress the advantages of stability inherent to tightly coupled systems, they also reinforce the notion that the administration is much more responsive than distinct: as speakers, they are the same.

While some reporters and opinion leaders found Rice's position in the administration one that would serve to positively unify the group and its rhetoric, others found this level of cohesion to be a dangerous precursor to groupthink. Australia's *Courier Mail* (Coorey, 2004, p. 23) reported, "Former secretary of state [Lawrence] Eagleburger stated flatly yesterday that Rice was a poor choice because she was too close to Bush. Her appointment would only continue to ensure Bush does not receive the broadest possible information on issues." The *Toronto Star* (Harpur, 2004, p. A01) argued that "the expected promotion of Rice, an unflagging loyalist and defender of the president, is sparking questions about who would raise a dissenting voice within a Bush cabinet." All of this evidence speaks to a larger point made by the *Houston Chronicle* (Roth & Martinez, 2004, p. A1): "Many historians warn that a president risks losing a valuable, broader perspective when he surrounds himself with people who consistently agree with him." Thus, the media highlighted the especially unified nature of this administration. This does not mean, however, that we should blindly accept the media's pronouncement of "lack of dissent" in the Bush administration. I take up this point below.

Absence of Dissent

The observation that the Bush administration is responsive without being distinct is closely related to another indicator of the tight coupling of this system. As Weick

noted (2001), loosely coupled systems preserve dissent; in tightly coupled systems, dissent is not as welcome. Orton and Weick (1990, p. 214) concluded from research on dissent in loosely coupled systems that “the strain for uniformity [found in tightly coupled systems] threatens dissent and restricts adaptability, creativity, and survival.” In order to be adaptable to changes in the environment, systems must preserve “minority influence” because “it intensifies cognitive effort of the majority” (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 214). The Bush administration, however, does not appear to value “minority influence,” as indicated by the media reports of the Powell-Rice shift. In his extensive interviews with members of the administration, Woodward (2002, 2004, 2006) found this to be true of the Bush administration, as the president sometimes directly quashed dissent, cabinet members discouraged dissent among themselves or from cabinet members to the president, and dissent had been designed out of the communication system.

First, there is evidence that President Bush himself actively discourages dissent. As Woodward (2002, p. 256) summarized,

Bush’s leadership style bordered on the hurried. He wanted action, solutions. Once on a course, he directed his energy at forging on, rarely looking back, scoffing at—even ridiculing—doubt and anything less than 100 percent commitment. He seemed to harbor few, if any regrets. His short declarations could seem impulsive.

This penchant for making a decision and staying the course has direct consequences on the type of communication that occurs during meetings. According to Woodward (2006,

p. 371), doubt about the war in Iraq was often invalidated among cabinet members.

“‘Hold it,’ Bush said once. ‘We know we’re doing the right thing. We’re on the right track here. We’re doing the right thing for ourselves, for our own interests and for the world. And don’t forget it.’” This tendency of the president to quash dissent was noted and spoken of by political insiders as well. As Woodward (2006, p. 325) stated,

Doubt [about the war in Iraq] never seeped into the president’s public rhetoric.

And as far as Powell’s and [then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard] Armitage’s experiences went, he was the same in private. Powell said Bush and Cheney didn’t dare express reservations. Armitage agreed. “They cannot have any doubt about the correctness of the policy because it opens too many questions into their minds.”

These two prominent members of the administration felt that the president and vice president were doing more than just reassuring those who had “cold feet” through their dismissal of questions. Instead, they seemed to be reassuring themselves that the war was the correct course by placing an informal moratorium on doubt. Additionally, “[General Richard] Myers could feel that when any doubt started to creep into the small, windowless Situation Room, the president almost stomped it out” (Woodward, 2006, p. 371). Regardless of the content of the doubt, whether about casualties, timing of elections, or “just a whiff of one of the uncertainties that accompany war, the president would try to set them all straight” (Woodward, 2006, p. 371).

While valuable, these observations are based on others’ perceptions of the president and his style of leadership. Woodward, however, was able to directly ask Bush

what role doubt and dissent play in the administration. Woodward (2006, p. 325-326) reported:

I had explored the issue of doubt with Bush in several interviews. In December 2001, three months after 9/11 and several weeks after the apparent success of the first part of the war in Afghanistan, he volunteered at the end of an interview the following: “I know it’s hard for you to believe, but I have not doubted what we’re doing. I have not doubted what we’re doing.... There is no doubt in my mind we’re doing the right thing.... First of all,” he said, “a president has got to be the calcium in the backbone. If I weaken, the whole team weakens. If I’m doubtful, I can assure you there will be a lot of doubt. If my confidence level in our ability declines, it will send ripples through the whole organization. I mean, it’s essential that we be confident and determined and united. I don’t need people around me who are not steady.... And if there’s kind of a hand-wringing attitude going on when times are tough, I don’t like it.”

In no uncertain terms, President Bush does not like doubt. Doubt and dissent are framed as weaknesses—a kind of wartime osteoporosis. While this may be just one characteristic of a strong, decisive leader, the consequences of this style may have led some in the administration to discourage “hand-wringing” in front of the president or with others.

Most often, dissent has been discouraged by members of the administration through the frame of being a “team player” or remaining “loyal” to the administration. Woodward’s interviews (2006) again provided valuable insights into the ways in which

cabinet members quieted dissent among themselves and their staffs through these frames. Woodward (2006, p. 100) stated, “Armitage thought Rice was running more and more interference for Bush [after the 2002 midterm elections]. ‘Condi, in my view, anytime someone wasn’t ready to do immediately exactly what the president wants, it was almost disloyal.’” Armitage also concluded

that the penalty for disagreement in the Bush White House was an implied or explicitly stated accusation that you were not on the team. If he or Powell said something might be harder than it looked, Rice or Hadley judged them not on the team. If they said, as they had, “Maybe the Iraqis might not like it if we occupy their country very long,” that means they were not on the team. (Woodward, 2006, p. 328).

While this may be partly indicative of the growing disagreements between the state department and the other cabinet-level departments, it also is representative of the Bush administration’s emphasis on the frames of loyalty and teamwork.

In addition to Armitage (an open critic of the Bush administration), other less confrontational political insiders have found themselves directly accused of the same type of misconduct by administration elites. In a teleconference meeting between Jay Garner, a leader of post-war efforts in Iraq, and Donald Rumsfeld, the two found themselves arguing over who would be appointed to run the various ministries in Iraq. While Garner felt that he, on the ground in Iraq, was in a strong position to know who was needed and what skills would be beneficial at each post, “Rumsfeld still wanted to handpick each one” (Woodward, 2006, p. 153). Woodward continued,

Soon they were arguing, and Garner tried another dose of reality, telling Rumsfeld that he could not possibly get new people over there on time [for the transfer of governmental power from the U.S. to Iraq].

“You know, it doesn’t seem like you’re on our team,” Rumsfeld said, according to a note-taker.

“Okay, that’s it,” Garner replied. The teleconference was over. Garner then sent a longhand note by fax to Rumsfeld insisting they had the same goals.

“I am a team player,” he wrote. He was deeply offended. It was the worst kind of bullying tactic—if you don’t agree with me you are disloyal.

Through both perception and direct experience, then, the president and other members of the administration discouraged dissent through the frames of loyalty and teamwork.

Earlier, I pointed briefly to the political science literature to note the important role advisors can play in determining what pieces of information reach the president. In order for information to follow this path, however, the information first has to reach those who report directly to the president. The evidence indicates that, at least at the defense department under Donald Rumsfeld’s command, dissent was completely designed out of the system. The only opinions reaching Rumsfeld were by design those that reinforced decisions that had already been made. In his search for a new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then-Chairman Army General Henry H. Shelton

was disappointed. As he had long suspected, it looked like Rumsfeld wanted a chairman in name only. The selection of Richard B. Myers meant that when it came to the hardest decisions there would be no one in the uniformed military

positioned and supported by law to provide alternative advice to the president and stand up to Rumsfeld. (Woodward, 2006, p. 70)

NATO commander General Jones agreed. According to Woodward (2006, p. 470), Jones told General Peter Pace “he believed that Rumsfeld so controlled everything [at the Department of Defense], even at the earliest stages, that they were not generating independent military advice as they had a legal obligation to do.” He felt that “Rumsfeld was driving and affecting the debates and decisions ‘politically.’ They, the uniformed military, should be worried about the ‘political spin,’ he said” (Woodward, 2006, p. 470). Woodward (2006, p. 74) concluded,

It was an irony that Rumsfeld had set up a system that did not ensure that he receive warnings from the uniformed military about rosy scenarios like those that had been promised from Vietnam and Kosovo. Strong, forceful military advice was bleached out of the system. The uniformed military was now just staff, its voice a polite whisper. Rumsfeld thought he had won. He was in control.

As we can see from several sources, there was real concern expressed about the quality of information that was forced through the system; instead of representing a wide array of existing opinion, the information that reached Rumsfeld was already self-selected to be in line with the party line. With so many critical voices missing from an extremely important debate about war in Iraq, it was virtually impossible for President Bush to base his Iraqi decisions on a full range and complement of opinions.

Important public figures expressed similar concerns about the opportunity for dissent to reach the president. One of these figures was former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. According to Woodward (2006, p. 407-408),

Kissinger liked Bush personally, though he told colleagues that it was not clear to him that the president really knew how to run the government. One of the big problems, he felt, was that Bush did not have the people or a system of national security policy decision making that ensured careful examination of the downsides of major decisions.

Bush's own chief of staff, Andy Card, had similar concerns. As best he could remember there had been some "informal, blue-sky discussions... along the lines of 'What could we do differently?'" But there had been no formal sessions to consider alternatives to staying in Iraq" (Woodward, 2006, p. 455). According to Kissinger, this was due to the fact that there were no systematic mechanisms in place to ensure this type of conversation was broached.

This deficiency in voices, however, was not isolated to the war against terrorism. On January 21 and April 2, 2002, the Bush administration invited expert economists to the White House for several forums on the topic of the U.S. economy. According to Stephen S. Roach (quoted in Alterman & Green, 2004, p. 60), the chief economist of Morgan Stanley, the administration "only called people who agreed with them" to attend and participate in the forum. Chief economist of Lehman Brothers, Ethan S. Harris, agreed and stated, "Basically 90 percent of the people are kind of preaching to the choir, and maybe they [the administration] have one or two middle-of-the-road

people. They really don't seem to want to hear opposing views'" (quoted in Alterman & Green, 2004, p. 60). Part of this apparent distaste for dissent is related to observations of the president's general distaste for lines of questioning that are thought-provoking or intended to generate alternatives. Whereas Spender and Grinyer (1995) argued that top management's role in systems (especially in loosely coupled systems, but in tightly coupled systems as well) is to "generate and to institutionalize self-questioning," President Bush appears to even have discouraged questions that would open the door to dissent. This has been particularly noted by those who are called to the White House to make presentations for the president or those who are observers at meetings. One example is David Kay, the leader of the CIA's hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He was asked to present Bush with his findings during the President's Daily Briefing, and he was, as he told Woodward (2006, p. 237), "almost shocked at Bush's lack of inquisitiveness." Woodward (2006, p. 237) continued:

Kay had a Ph.D. and had taught at higher levels, and he was used to being asked challenging, aggressive questions. A lot of trauma in getting a graduate degree was surviving the environment of doubt, skepticism, and challenges. "He trusted me more than I trusted me," Kay later recalled. "If the positions had been reversed, and this is primarily personality, I think, I would have probed. I would have asked. I would have said, 'What have you done? What haven't you done? Why haven't you done it?'"

In addition to the president's personal characteristics, others have noted that the combination of personalities in the cabinet was not conducive to insightful conversation.

One of these people is Robert D. Blackwill, brought on to the NSC to help manage post-war activities in Iraq. He attended meetings at various levels (principals, NSC, etc.) and found the combination of personalities at the table to be one that led to meetings that “rarely [aired] the real issues” (Woodward, 2006, p. 241). Woodward (2006, p. 241-242) summarized his insights as follows:

Blackwill, a veteran of the Kissinger style, was astonished. Rumsfeld made his presentation looking at the president, while Powell looked straight ahead. Then Powell would make his to the president with Rumsfeld looking straight ahead. They didn’t even comment on each other’s statements or views. So Bush never had the benefit of a serious, substantive discussion between his principal advisers. And the president, whose legs often jiggled under the table, did not force a discussion.

Blackwill saw Rice try to intervene and get nowhere. So critical comments and questions—especially about military strategy—never surfaced. Blackwill felt sympathy for Rice. This young woman, he thought, had to deal with three of the titans of national security—Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Powell—all of whom had decades of experience, cachet and strong views. The image locked in Blackwill’s mind of Rice, dutiful, informed and polite, at one end of the table, and the inexperienced president at the other, legs dancing, while the bulls stalked out their ground, almost snorting defiantly, hoofs pawing the table, daring a challenge that never came.

The picture that surfaces from all of these accounts is of an administration that reinforces each other's inability or lack of desire to pose challenging questions to one another about the decisions at hand. Instead, Bush's status as a novice politician, and perhaps the insecurity that comes with inexperience, is preyed upon (either deliberately or unintentionally) by those with considerably more experience and possibly larger egos.

In a White House with this type of culture, many visitors to the administration self-monitored their dissent, and this, in combination with the factors mentioned above, had a discernible impact on the quality of information that the president received. Woodward documented at length how Jay Garner, as a reaction to believing the administration was under the influence of "war Kool-Aid," monitored the information he presented to the president. Woodward stated (2006, p. 124) that in Garner's final meeting with Bush

with all the stories, jocularity, buddy-buddy talk, bluster and confidence in the Oval Office, Garner had left out the headline. He had not mentioned the problems he saw [in Iraq], or even hinted at them. He did not tell Bush about the three tragic mistakes he believed that [presidential envoy to Iraq Paul "Jerry"] Bremer, supported by Rumsfeld, had made—de-Baathification [of the Iraqi government], disbanding the army and dumping the Iraqi governing group. Instead, he had said Bremer was great and had painted a portrait of an Iraq where a Shiite cleric [Ali al Sistani] envisioned an Iraq governed on the principles of Jesus Christ and joining the union as the 51st State. On top of that, he had told

Bush that everyone on the Iraqi street loved him. Once again the aura of the presidency had shut out the most important news—the bad news.

Woodward had the opportunity to ask Rumsfeld directly if the president was aware of Garner's "three tragic mistakes" speech that was delivered to the Department of Defense just prior to the briefing with the president. Rumsfeld told Woodward (2006, p. 124), "“Oh, I think the president knew that there were big disagreements over de-Baathification. And big disagreements over the military. There's no question that the president was aware of those issues.”" Woodward, however, could not find the evidence to support Rumsfeld's claims.

Not one to let an opportunity slip, Woodward again broached this conversation two months later during breakfast with Garner at Woodward's home. Garner told Woodward (2006, p. 125) that the final meeting with Bush "was more of a happy-glad than it was a business meeting." Woodward asked Garner if he wished he had told the president about the three tragic mistakes, and Garner responded (Woodward, 2006, p. 126),

"You know, I don't know if I had that moment to live over again I don't know if I'd do that or not. But if I had done that—and quite frankly, I mean, I wouldn't have had a problem doing that—but in my thinking, the door's closed. I mean, there's nothing I can do to open the door again. And I think if I had said that to the president in front of Cheney and Condoleezza Rice and Rumsfeld in there, the president would have looked at them and they would have rolled their eyes

back and he would have thought, Boy, I wonder why we didn't get rid of this guy sooner?"

Bush, for his part, did not press Garner. He took Garner's optimistic report at face value and left it as such. As Woodward (2006, p. 126) concluded, "The whole atmosphere too often resembled a royal court, with Cheney and Rice in attendance, some upbeat stories, exaggerated good news, and a good time had by all." While this statement is certainly literary, it does not, based on the evidence available to us, appear to be hyperbolic.

In fact, the level of self-monitoring reached even the highest-ranking members of the administration. As Woodward (2002, p. 322) stated, "The president would not tolerate public discord." This emphasis on "unquestioned good news" led to self monitoring, and it also led some members of the administration to question the information that reaches the inner sanctum of the Oval Office. This is especially true in the context of war in Iraq where "national security decisions about military action often had to be made on the best available evidence and that might fall far short of courtroom proof" (Woodward, 2002, p. 135). Much has been made of former CIA director George Tenet's proclamation that the case for Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction was a "slam dunk." Andy Card was one of the people who felt uneasy about this statement. As Woodward (2002, p. 354) revealed, "Card wondered if he had done enough [to question the 'slam dunk' statement]. He prided himself on the quality of the information flow to the president but this information had been flat wrong."

Rice, in her role as NSC adviser, would not have allowed Tenet's off-the-cuff remark to creep into her meetings. Woodward (2002, p. 124) reported that Rice "liked

to deliver the president clear, unambiguous summaries that reflected their thinking. The best way frequently was to orchestrate and script the next day's NSC meeting. They agreed on who was going to say what, and in what order." While this may ensure clarity, it does not allow flexibility of any sort. Even if one of Rice's deputies at the NSC wanted to raise a line of commentary or questions (along the lines of Jay Garner's "three tragic mistakes"), they would not be allowed to do so unless it was in the script.

Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel felt so compelled by his concern for the quality of information reaching the president that he directly addressed Bush on this topic after a June 21, 2005, lunch for Senate Republicans held at the White House. Their conversation (quoted in Woodward, 2006, p. 399-400) opened with directness combined with the necessary platitudes:

"Mr. President," Hagel said, "let me ask you a question. I believe that you are getting really bubbled in here in the White House on Iraq. Do you ever reach outside your inner circle of people, outside your national security council?"

Then he added the obligatory softening. "This is not a reflection on, in any way, or an assertion of inadequacy. That's not my point here. I think it's important for presidents, especially in a time of war, to get some other opinions—of people that maybe don't agree with you, or you don't agree with them. Call them in. Sit them down. Listen to them. Do you ever do that?"

"Well, I kind of leave that to Hadley."

"I know that your national security adviser talks to people, but do you talk to people?"

“Well, maybe I should talk to Hadley about that.”

“I think it is very important, Mr. President, that you get some outside opinions here. Just to test your theories and how you’re doing.” Hagel mentioned themes from histories and biographies he had read. “When a nation’s at war, the president is under tremendous pressure. You go deeper into that bunker, and I don’t think it’s good for you.” There, he had said it.

Following this conversation, Hagel received a phone call from Stephen Hadley inviting him to give this same speech to a group of NSC staffers. Hagel left this meeting unsatisfied, however. He told *U.S. News & World Report* (Whitelaw, 2005), “‘Things aren’t getting better; they’re getting worse. The White House is completely disconnected from reality’”—a direct consequence of a system which has become “too closed” (Spender and Grinyer, 1995, 1996). Obviously Hadley was upset with this interview, but Hagel was proud of the clarity with which he was able to make his statements. Despite his strong opinions voiced to the press, however, “his private assessment was worse: The administration had no strategic thinker. Rice was weak. The military was being emasculated and severely damaged by uniformed sycophants” (Woodward, 2006, p. 400). What Hagel was concerned about was that the Bush administration may have the factors in place for a system-wide failure—their insulated nature would render them unable to sense environmental change and contain problems before they reached unstoppable levels.

Responsiveness

Thus far I have devoted much time and space to the lack of distinction displayed by members of the Bush administration. We have evidence from cabinet members, military leaders, political appointees, elected political leaders, and the media that the members of the administration are for the most part uniform in their ideologies, and that they are almost always uniform in their public persona. The next step in the case for the administration as a tightly coupled system is to turn to their responsiveness. As Weick (2001) told us, in tightly coupled systems the elements continuously, constantly, significantly, directly and immediately impact one another. While this is extremely difficult to determine without direct access to the inner workings of the administration, I believe that there is an intervening factor which renders this administration tightly coupled: war.

Linking a particular organizational “product” with a level of coupling is not a novel concept. In fact, Orton and Weick (1990, p. 206) referred to Clark’s work which posited that “the loosely coupled structure of universities in an inevitable consequence of their primary production material: knowledge.” As Clark (1983, p. 16) stated, “An academic system works with materials that are increasingly specialized and numerous, knowledge-intensive and knowledge-extensive with a momentum of autonomy.” Following this line of reasoning, I argue that engaging in war has the momentum of interdependence. First, intelligence must be gathered. In the case of war with Iraq, the CIA sent undercover operatives into Kuwait and Iraq to do everything from scouting potential sites of WMDs to obtaining armament to finding and paying informants. This

information was (presumably) used by the Department of Defense to develop and carry out the war plan. Simultaneously, the State Department attempted to acquire support from other nations in the form of supplies for troops and for civilians, money, equipment, access, and/or troops. Finally, once major military actions had ceased, it was up to the National Security Council, Defense, and State to leverage and rebuild infrastructure in Iraq, ensure security for Iraqi civilians, and to assist the Iraqis in the creation of a new constitution and a new form of government. Because the information, plans, functions, and outcomes of one department are so vital for the information, plans, functions, and outcomes of the other departments, I argue that war is a production which requires its system to be tightly coupled; tight coupling is inherent to war (see especially Hersch, 2004; Woodward, 2004).

Beyond general comments that to be engaged in war requires tight coupling, responsiveness has been demonstrated in the administration through the relationships the cabinet members share with the president, as well as their relationships to one another. While some of these relationships have been encouraged (or discouraged) through the transformation of the Bush administration into a war administration, many preexist the attacks of September 11. Because of this, and especially because of the connections of many cabinet members to the president since the early days of the presidency, I argue that the Bush administration had a tendency toward tight coupling before our engagement in Iraq; the war concretized what was already in the air.

First, Bush attempted to design a White House that was open. He wanted people such as Rice, Cheney, Card, White House Communications director Karen Hughes,

presidential adviser Karl Rove, and White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer to be able to see him on the spur of the moment. Bush told Woodward (2002, p. 255), “‘I believe that a president must give people access’” and that “‘part of the job satisfaction of being a White House staffer is in the capacity to talk to the president one-on-one.’”

Additionally, Bush argued that the communication must be reciprocal: “‘It makes my job a heck of a lot easier to be able to have access to a lot of people’ to get their feedback or reactions” (Woodward, 2002, p. 255). Whether or not this strategy has been implemented and/or successful, it implies a certain level of candor and closeness between the president, staffers, and cabinet members.

As has already been noted, the media broadly speculate that Rice and Bush have a close relationship in the White House, and Mann and Woodward, with their insights into the administration, also argue that the two have a close bond. Mann (2004, p. 315) argued that “of all the top-level officials, she was by far the closest to Bush.” When disagreements occurred between Rumsfeld and Powell, as they often did, “it was Rice who helped the president reach a decision” (Mann, 2004, p. 315). Woodward also noted the closeness of the two in more personal ways. He stated (2002, p. 34),

Beginning in the presidential campaign when she was Bush’s chief foreign policy adviser, Rice had developed a very close relationship with Bush. Tall, with near perfect posture, a graceful walk and a beaming smile, she had become a permanent fixture in the presidential inner circle. The president and first lady had in a sense become her family.

With no family of her own, Rice could often be found celebrating holidays with the Bushes at either Camp David or the “Western White House” in Crawford, Texas. Rice was not only an influential figure among Bush’s advisers and foreign policy team, she was also Bush’s friend.

George Tenet, despite his eventual fall from grace, played a very important role in the first term of Bush’s presidency. This term saw the attacks on the World Trade Center, the initiation of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, as well as phase two of the war, Operation Iraqi Freedom. As Woodward (2004, p. 67-78) stated, “By the beginning of 2002, CIA Director George Tenet’s stock with the president was way up.... ‘I like him,’ Bush said, ‘and I trust him, which is more important.’”

Although not a formal member of the cabinet, Karl Rove successfully parlayed his influence as a campaign advisor into a role as a generalist presidential adviser. As the *New York Times* (Berke & Sanger, 2002, p. A1) reported,

Karl Rove, President Bush's top political adviser, is expanding his White House portfolio by inserting himself into the debate over how to deal with the Middle East, trade, terrorism, Latin America and other foreign policy matters, say outside advisers and administration officials, including some who are rankled by his growing involvement. Mr. Rove’s influence beyond domestic affairs has developed gradually and is hard to measure. As one of the president’s closest advisers, he offers his counsel in private, usually only for the president’s ears. Additionally, it has been noted that Brent Scowcroft, the Chairman of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and president of the Scowcroft Group international

consulting firm, carved out a niche for himself in the Bush administration. As Woodward (2004, p. 159) stated, “Though he was working as a private consultant, few outsiders were as close to the major players in the current Bush administration as Scowcroft.” His ties to George H. W. Bush as National Security Advisor from 1989 to 1993 help explain his connection to the current Bush president, despite the fact that he would eventually become one of the George W. Bush administration’s “most unlikely high-level dissidents” (Mann, 2004, p. 340).

Vice President Dick Cheney is perhaps the most elusive member of the administration, often seen as the puppet master pulling Bush’s strings. According to Woodward (2002, p. 37), Bush somewhat clairvoyantly asked Cheney to be his running mate with these words, ““If times are good, I’m going to need your advice, but not nearly as much as if times are bad. Crisis management is an essential part of the job.”” Throughout the first term, Cheney “carved out a special position in the administration and held great sway with the president” (Woodward, 2004, p. 27). As Woodward (2004, p. 27) stated, Cheney

was the résumé vice president: White House chief of staff to President at age 34; then 10 years as the only congressman from Wyoming, his home state; briefly the No. 2 House Republican leader before being selected by Bush’s father to be secretary of defense in 1989.

Woodward had the opportunity to ask Rumsfeld about the general notion that “Cheney is the all-powerful vice president who controls the president.” Rumsfeld responded,

“That’s nonsense. Clearly they have a good relationship. You can feel it in the room. But the president is *the* president, and let there be no doubt about it. The vice president isn’t even slightly confused on the issue. His handling of issues when the president’s in the room is, in my view, just perfect in the sense that he does not take strong positions when the president’s in the room that could conceivably position him contrary to the president.... He asks good questions. But he doesn’t put the president in a corner or take away his options.”

(Woodward, 2006, p. 486)

Woodward found Rumsfeld’s comments to be revealing. He stated, “I wondered how Cheney’s questions or comments could put the president in a corner or take away his options. Presumably if it was nonsense that Cheney was all-powerful he would be in no position to do either” (Woodward, 2002, p. 486). Mann similarly noted the power of the ever-elusive Cheney. He stated that communications director Karen Hughes and Karl Rove “spent their days ensuring that the president got full public attention and credit for being in charge of the battle against terrorism” (Mann, 2004, p. 297). After Cheney’s particularly sound and coherent speech on the events of September 11, 2001, Cheney all but disappeared for an extended period of time. Mann (2004, p. 297) noted, “There were delicate suggestions that in the early days of the crisis he might have overshadowed the president,” clearly a problem for Bush’s still-evolving image.

Whether or not Cheney exhibits a level of power greater than that of the president, Rumsfeld believed Cheney to be extremely honest with Bush in private. As he told Woodward (2002, p. 486), “[Cheney] knows that one of the prices of proximity

to the president is the willingness, the burden that goes with that is the burden of having to tell him the truth.”

While we may never know the full content of the private conversations between President Bush and his advisers and cabinet members, we know that Bush did not share everything with those who had “direct access” to him. Woodward (2004, p. 30-32) told us that the speech that would become known as the Bush Doctrine

was an incredibly broad commitment to go after terrorists and those who sponsor and protect terrorists, rather than just a proposal for a targeted retaliatory strike [after 9/11]. The decision was made without consulting Cheney, Powell, or Rumsfeld.... The president, Rice, Hughes, and the speechwriters had made one of the most significant policy decisions in years, and the secretary of state had not been involved.

While some may argue that there is a difference between “rhetoric” and “policy,” this distinction cannot be easily applied to speeches made by Bush. As Woodward (2004, p. 216) stated,

[Director of the NSA, Air Force Lieutenant General Michael V.] Hayden knew that speeches, drafts of which were circulated among the various agencies, were a way of ironing out details and reaching consensus. He listened to and read them carefully. Policy was made in speeches, and with someone like George W. Bush, who was plainspoken, they were even more important.

Rumsfeld, too, “was keenly aware that Bush’s presidential speeches were policy” (Woodward, 2004, p. 134). To provide consultation on a speech, then, was to put one’s

stamp on policy—both foreign and domestic. What is notable about the Bush Doctrine is that the person who would be the face of this doctrine and be held accountable to its statements, Colin Powell, was not given the opportunity to have a say in the creation of the doctrine.

Bush's relationship to Colin Powell is particularly interesting in light of the commotion that his resignation caused among the leaders and media of the world. Though the public viewed Powell's departure as a stunning defeat for "moderation" in the administration, his access to the president reveals a different story. What is most notable about Powell's relationship with the president is its absence. Woodward (2004, p. 79) wrote, "After nearly a year as secretary of state [Powell] had not achieved a personal relationship with President Bush. They were uncomfortable with each other. A sense of competition hovered in the background of their relationship, a low-voltage pulse nearly always present...." This competition diminished Powell's effectiveness as secretary of state, prompting *Time* magazine to ask on September 2, 2001, "Where have you gone, Colin Powell?" It is also notable that Colin Powell was the only significant departure from the Bush administration during the post-election changes in 2004. As Woodward (2004, p. 354) stated,

The president had already talked to Card about making a lot of changes for the second term—some new cabinet officers, some new senior White House staff. Change was good, Bush had indicated, although Card knew that change ran counter to Bush's gut. The president liked old, comfortable shoes. His staff had become comfortable shoes.

Powell was asked to leave despite the fact that he had not really done anything wrong. More controversial members of the administration such as Donald Rumsfeld, Alberto Gonzales, and George Tenet, however, were forced to resign in the midst of scandal. The only uncomfortable shoe was Powell; the rest were kept on until they literally fell apart.

Communication in the Bush Administration System

Despite the fact that most members of the administration, with the notable exception of Colin Powell, had a great level of access to the president, it appears that these relationships did not prove useful, were not always reciprocal, and were often not characteristic of the relationships between cabinet members or departments. In a necessarily tightly coupled system, these information glitches and oversights can have a profound impact on the ability of the system to achieve its goals.

Part of the reason for the waning communication between departments is legal. Following the 1967 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the federal government fully or partially releases documents under its control to various audiences. While the Clinton administration took several steps to expand the act and release historical intelligence and electronic documents, the Bush administration (as did the Regan administration) has formally and informally discouraged the release of former presidents' documents. As Alterman and Green (2004, p. 87) noted, a memo drafted by Alberto Gonzalez and delivered by former Attorney General John Ashcroft "encourages agencies to withhold records unless they lack a 'sound legal basis' to do so." According to Lucy Dalglish, the executive director of the Reports Committee for Freedom of the Press, the memo "'sends

a message throughout the entire federal government to stonewall or deny requests whenever possible,” (quoted in Alterman & Green, 2004, p. 87) or at least until they are required to fill a request by law—a process which may take years to work its way through the legal system.

Second, President Bush does not see the exchange of information as a reciprocal process. In an interview with Bob Woodward, Bush was asked if he explained to Rice and others that he was testing them and attempting to be provocative on the issue of war planning in Afghanistan. Bush responded,

“Of course not. I’m the commander—see, I don’t need to explain—I do not need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation.” (Woodward, 2002, p. 146)

This attitude toward reciprocity was also reflected in the plans for and delivery of Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address. In addition to topics such as education reform, job creation, and health care reform (Bush, 2003), he included evidence for Iraq’s attempt to obtain uranium for nuclear weapons. As Woodward (2004, p. 294-295) stated,

Then Bush spoke 16 words that would become notorious: “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” It was one of his more innocuous accusations, and he accurately attributed the allegation to the British. But less than four months earlier, Tenet and the CIA had excised the sentence from the president’s speech in Cincinnati because the assertion could not be confirmed

and was thought to be shaky. Tenet had not reviewed the State of the Union speech, and Hadley had forgotten the earlier CIA warning.... This skepticism apparently did not make it in any convincing form to the president.

This quote indicates that the ties between members of the administration may be inconsistent. Although members of the administration were encouraged by the president's "open door" policy to make use of their access to him, they could not be assured that they would be involved in speech or policy creation—even when their expertise and insights directly relate to the matter at hand.

This oversight in communication also extended beyond the president; as Woodward reported, members of the administration did not always talk to one another—even in matters as critical as war planning. He stated:

Incredibly, Rice found that Rumsfeld at times would not return her phone calls when she had questions about war planning or troop deployments [in Iraq]. She complained to Rumsfeld, who reminded her that the chain of command did not include the national security adviser. Rice complained to the president. Bush's response was to try to be playful with Rumsfeld.

"I know you won't talk to Condi," Bush once teased Rumsfeld, "But you've got to talk to her."

Card was astonished. The whole scene would have been comic, [NSC senior director of defense Frank] Miller thought, if the issues hadn't involved war, life and death. (Woodward, 2006, p. 109-110)

At least for Rumsfeld, the formal channels of communication superseded the need for increased communication throughout the entire network. This is not surprising as Rumsfeld made it clear that he valued the chain of command. He told Woodward (2006, p. 44),

“I decided that it was enormously important, that if I was going to be an effective link between the president of the United States and the combatant commander, I knew my relationship with the president and the access and his interest and how he feels and his body language on things, and I knew that it was that that had to be communicated down to Tom Franks and through to his people.”

Despite this concern for access and communication between the president and the defense department, Rumsfeld was significantly less concerned with access and communication between departments. We have already seen that Rice had a difficult time getting information from Rumsfeld, but differences in ideology frequently closed communication between Defense and State as well. As Woodward (2004, p. 128-129) revealed,

One night [Cheney] remarked privately that the administration had these intense discussions about the two sides of the Iranian government, that of the democratically elected president, Mohammad Khatami, and the powerful theocratic religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. “The debate is whether it’s two sides of the same government or whether it’s two separate governments,” he said of Iran, adding jokingly, “The same question applies to Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell.”

Rumsfeld and Powell held opposing views on the issue of preemptive attacks; while Rumsfeld stated without pause that defense was insufficient, Powell was hesitant to employ the military under a theory rather than an immediate threat to the U.S. These policy disagreements, in combination with their personalities and ego, ensured that Rumsfeld and Powell would be formally cut off from one another, relying on friends and insiders in the other's department to inform them of each other's plans.

Despite his infrequent communication with Powell and other cabinet-level departments in the administration, Rumsfeld was extremely adept at cultivating his own relationship with the president. His abilities even affected the course and content of meetings at the White House. In one meeting, Woodward (2006, p. 276) stated,

the discussion [about granting legal rights to detainees in Guantánamo Bay] drifted off and the decision was left hanging. Some of the backbenchers at the NSC meeting were astonished at the deference the president gave Rumsfeld. It was as if Rice and the NSC had one serious, formal process going on while the president and Rumsfeld had another one—informal, chatty and dominant.

Rumsfeld seemed to put Defense first—which may be essential when it comes to resource allocation, but, as many members of the administration have noted, it can be harmful for the system when it comes to war. The administration as a tightly coupled system is not getting the information it needs; without it, the system may collapse.

Trust

These relationships between and among the cabinet members and the president certainly influenced the role of trust in this system. As Weick (2001, p. 401) observed,

one of the factors on which actors in a loosely coupled system rely is trust. Spender and Grinyer (1996, p. 25) similarly referred to trust when they stated that “organizational rituals of confidence and good faith hold the loosely coupled system together.” The administration, however, seems to privilege loyalty over trust. We have already seen several ways in which loyalty has become a “god term” for the administration, and this requirement for membership has been intentional since the first days of the administration. As Woodward (2006, p. xii) stated, “Bush had selected Card [as White House chief of staff] because his father said there was no more loyal person.” In addition, Rice “has not been ambiguous in demonstrating her loyalty and enthusiasm for the Bush nee Rice doctrine” (Lusane, 2006, p. 191).

Members of the administration such as Card, Cheney, and Rumsfeld may have been chosen for their loyalty to the Bush family, but Powell had to learn about loyalty on the national stage. Blumenthal (2006, p. 112; see also Lusane 2006) reported,

Powell had wanted to stay on for the first six months of Bush’s second term to help shepherd a new Middle East peace process, but the president insisted on his resignation. Condoleezza Rice was named in his place. She had failed at every important task as national security adviser, pointedly neglecting terrorism before September 11, enthusiastically parroting the false claim that Saddam had a nuclear weapons program while suppressing contrary intelligence, mismanaging her part of postwar policy so completely that she had to cede it to a deputy, and eviscerating the Middle East road map. As incompetent as she was at her actual job, she was agile at bureaucratic positioning. Early on, she figured out how to

align with the neoconservatives and how to damage Powell. Her usurpation is a lesson to him in blind ambition and loyalty.

Although there is a fine distinction between trust and loyalty, the difference becomes striking in the case of Colin Powell. It reveals to us that loyalty must come first; then one can be “trusted” to do something (stay on message, adapt public statements to reflect unity among the administration, hold dissenting views in check, etc.). This view of loyalty is more common to hierarchical organizations than to loosely coupled systems. Noam Chomsky (2006, p. 33) also noted this distinction and argued that “protecting the country is... a far lower priority than maintaining tight top-down control, as in tyrannical corporate structures. The Cheney-Rumsfeld team for which Bush is the front man has shown repeatedly that it is obsessed with authority and discipline.” Loyalty, then, can be seen as disciplining rather than empowering.

This is further reinforced by evidence showing that Powell, the one person who in perception or in actuality was seen as “the dissenter,” did not trust and was not trusted by the administration. Woodward (2002, p. 325; see also Lusane, 2006; Mann, 2004) related the following conversation between Powell and his long-time friend, Dick Armitage:

“I’m holding back the fucking gates here,” Armitage reported [to Powell].

“They’re eating cheese on you”—an old military expression for gnawing on someone and enjoying it. People in the Defense Department and the vice president’s office were trying to do him in, Armitage said. He had heard from reliable media contacts that a barrage was being unloaded on Powell. He was

leaning too much on Arafat, the White House was going to trim his sails, he was going to fail. Armitage said he couldn't verify who was leaking this, but he had names of senior people in Defense and in Cheney's office.

"That's unbelievable," Powell said. "I just heard the same thing." He had had cocktails with some reporters traveling with him and they reported that their sources in Cheney's office were declaring he had gone too far, was off the reservation, and about to be reined in.

"People are really putting your shit in the street," Armitage said.

Because Powell (or at least the public's view of Powell) could not be disciplined, his credibility had to be questioned, and because of Powell's popularity with the American people, it had to be done in public. This is somewhat ironic because Powell's views did not differ from administration views to the extent that had largely been touted by the media. Mann (2004, p. xvii) argued that in comparison to Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Wolfowitz, Powell and Armitage may have had dovish political views, "but within the broad spectrum of American foreign policy over the past three decades, they were hardly doves and in fact shared much in common with the other Vulcans." Mann claimed that Powell and Armitage had a relationship with the administration's hawks that resembled a "feuding family." He stated (Mann, 2004, p. xvii), "They bickered; but they seemed to need one another, and they all kept on coming back to the dinner table." Lusane (2006) further noted that Powell was united with the hawkish members of the administration. He argued that Powell became a "charter member" (Lusane, 2006, p. 122) of the ideology and objectives of the administration as a whole. The notion of a divided

administration, then, was largely based on perception. The truth was an administration that was even more tightly coupled than suspected.

Powell was not the only one who was not trusted in the ranks of the administration. Woodward (2006, p. 234) reported, “In private, Tenet told Armitage he believed that Hadley was a Cheney-Rumsfeld ‘sleeping agent’—an intelligence term for an undercover agent who lurks dormant without a mission for years, but who can be awakened to do the bidding of his handlers.” It was an exaggeration, but, as Woodward asserted, it was representative of the increasing discord between officials at the CIA and the NSC.

Just as the president and vice president did not seem to trust all members of the administration, cabinet-level members of the administration were suspicious of each other, as well as of the president and vice president. A culture of suspicion was allowed to fester in which department was pitted against department, secretary kept watch over secretary, and secretaries cast a wary eye toward the president and vice president. This was not an environment of trust, but rather one in which loyalty must be demonstrated and re-demonstrated in order to keep one’s shit off the street.

Differential Participation

Part of this suspicion may stem from a lack of differential participation—the notion that most members of the organization are not constantly involved in or care about every dimension of the organization’s operation (Weick, 2001, p. 396). Whereas loosely coupled systems demonstrate differential participation, tightly coupled systems are less likely to do so. In the Bush administration, Cheney and Rumsfeld in particular

were seen as having the same power as the president. For example, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Chief of Staff to Colin Powell from 2002-2005, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* (2005, p. 10),

In President Bush's first term, some of the most important decisions about U.S. national security—including vital decisions about postwar Iraq—were made by a secretive, little-known cabal. It was made up of a very small group of people led by Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.... I believe that the decisions of this cabal were sometimes made with the full and witting support of the president and sometimes with something less. More often than not, then-national security advisor Condoleezza Rice was simply steamrolled by this cabal. Its insular and secret workings were efficient and swift—not unlike the decision-making one would associate more with a dictatorship than a democracy. This furtive process was camouflaged neatly by the dysfunction and inefficiency of the formal decision-making process, where decisions, if they were reached at all, had to wend their way through the bureaucracy, with its dissenters, obstructionists and “guardians of the turf.” But the secret process was ultimately a failure. It produced a series of disastrous decisions and virtually ensured that the agencies charged with implementing them would not or could not execute them well.

Wilkerson spoke primarily here of an informal decision-making process that elevated both Rumsfeld and Cheney to the same level as the president, but there were also formal

ways in which the differential in power that is characteristic of loosely coupled systems was greatly reduced.

The most prominent of the legal documents that minimized the power differences between cabinet-level members of the administration was Executive Order 13292, decreed on March 25, 2003. According to Blumenthal (2006, p. 355), the document “grants the greatest expansion of the power of the vice president in American history.” The order gives the vice president the same power as the president to classify and declassify intelligence information. This is important because, as Blumenthal (2006, p. 355) stated, “By controlling classification, the vice president can in effect control intelligence and, through that, foreign policy.” This act further tightens an already tightly coupled system; now the CIA, the Department of Defense, the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Office for Homeland Security can be significantly affected by not only the president, but also by the vice president. As Blumenthal summarized (2006, p. 355-356),

Bush operates on the radical notion of the “unitary executive,” the principle that the president has inherent and limitless powers in his role as commander in chief, above the constitutional system of checks and balances [for more information on the unitary executive, see Calabresi & Rhodes, 1992]. By his extraordinary order, he elevated Cheney to his own level, an acknowledgment that the vice president was already the de facto executive in national security. Never before has any president diminished and divided his power in this manner. Now the unitary executive inherently includes the unitary vice president.

Cheney was given power far beyond that of previous vice presidents. John Nance Garner, vice president to Franklin Roosevelt, once stated that the vice presidency “wasn’t worth a bucket of warm spit.” Mann (2004, p. 276) concluded, “Cheney turned the same job into a flourishing vineyard.”

This extension of power did not stop with Vice President Cheney. Through Bush’s first term in office, Cheney’s deputy, Scooter Libby, was also granted a great level of power. As Woodward (2004, p. 48) stated,

Libby had three formal titles. He was chief of staff to Vice President Cheney; he was also national security adviser to the vice president; and he was finally an assistant to Bush. It was a trifecta of positions probably never before held by a single person. Scooter was a power center unto himself, and accordingly, a force multiplier for Cheney’s agenda and views.

Bush also reduced the differential participation of members of his cabinet beyond the vice president and his deputy in informal ways. Rice’s strong connection to the president was spoken of at length during the transition from Powell to Rice as secretary of state. Karl Rove also gained a significant amount of power in the administration, with various responses from the rest of the cabinet. Finally, Donald Rumsfeld, although his position did not legally change during his tenure at the Pentagon, used his incredible access to and familiarity with the president to increase his status in the administration until the time of his resignation. Woodward (2006, p. 485) asked Rumsfeld about Bush’s ability as a wartime president, and the conversation turned to the topic of Rumsfeld. Their exchange follows:

“He’s [Bush] getting to know the people and taking their measure,” Rumsfeld continued, “and seeing how they handle those questions and how they answer them and how much they know and who they rely on for answers to things. And he ends up coming away with a confidence level, and he develops an ability to know how much—how long a leash he wants different people to be on.”

“How long’s your leash?” I asked.

“Oh, goodness gracious,” he replied. “Don’t ask me.”

“I am.”

“No. I have no idea,” he said.

Rumsfeld certainly knew that Bush gave him a very long leash.

“Do you feel a tug sometimes?”

He declined to answer.

Although Rumsfeld did not answer Woodward’s questions about his status in the administration, all the testimony from political insiders, political informants, and White House media correspondents indicates that Rumsfeld did indeed have a very long leash. What all of this evidence indicates is that the Bush administration does not have a high level of differential participation between members. Instead, the “war cabinet” of Cheney and Libby, Rumsfeld, Rice and Hadley, Bush, Tenet (for a short amount of time), and the notable exception of Powell, have had or continue to have access to a domain of power in the administration that is more representative of presidential power than cabinet member power, and certainly greater than chief-of-staff-of-a-cabinet member power. With so many people allowed to make decisions that, particularly in

wartime, directly influence other members of the administration, the system cannot help but be tightly coupled.

Conclusion

Following Weick's definitions of system coupling, we can see that the Bush administration exhibits tight coupling. They are responsive to one another and present a unified front, the administration has not preserved dissent, they have direct effects on one another, their bond is one of loyalty rather than trust, and formal and informal steps have been taken to reduce the differences in their participation, their power, and their abilities in the administration. These characteristics are further magnified and concretized by the fact that this is a war administration. Because the project of war requires higher levels of participation and coordination between members, this administration had few other choices. They are dependent upon one another to achieve their ends. The process has been so mismanaged, however, that it has caused problems for the administration, particularly with the war in Iraq, and Weick's (2001, p. 389) words come to mind: "With tight couplings, diagnosis is less accurate, but interventions on the basis of the misdiagnosis have large effects." The unsuccessful hunt for weapons of mass destruction and the prolonged and expensive war in which we are engaged unfortunately demonstrate the fit between Weick's theory and Bush's practice.

Notes

¹ To date, all U.S. presidents have been male; therefore the use of the masculine pronoun in-text is a gender conscious decision.

CHAPTER IV

STEM CELLS AND THE ENACTED ENVIRONMENT

On July 19, 2006, President George W. Bush exercised his power of veto for the first time in his presidency. The President's pen was used to strike down H.R. 810, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act. This bill, co-sponsored by Representatives Diana DeGette (D-Colorado) and Mike Castle (R-Delaware), would have allowed federal funding for research conducted on new lines of embryonic stem extracted from embryos frozen at U.S. fertility clinics. Bush vetoed this bill, according to White House Press Secretary Tony Snow (Baker, 2006, sec. A), because he believed funding this research to be "morally objectionable." While the President's decision was not surprising to many pundits, I argue that the case of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research clearly demonstrates the constraining nature of the enacted environment. The constructs of commitment and social information processing appear to be particularly relevant to this case. In order to examine these claims further, I discuss Weick's concept of the enacted environment and use them to gain insight into George W. Bush's position on embryonic stem cell research throughout his presidency.

The Enacted Environment

Whereas many classical theories of the organization understand the environment to be something "outside of" the organization, Weick (1969, p. 27) argued that "it may be more correct to argue that organizing consists of adapting to an enacted environment, an environment which is *constituted* by the actions of independent human actors." As

organizational actors attempt to make sense of their environment, those actors “have something to do with the ways in which environments are discussed” (Weick, 1969, p. 63). Those discussions, then, serve to define the environment to which the actors are responding. It is in this way that organizations and organizational members *enact* their environment. They do not simply *react to* the environment; instead they play a substantial role in determining the world around them. This is important because the environment they enact then constrains future activity. It is as though once we enact an environment, it becomes almost a tangible force that has considerable influence on how we see, understand, and react to the world. As Weick (2001, p. 179) stated, “Organizations often impose that which subsequently imposes on them.”

This has been found to be true of futures markets where investors can cause stock prices to rise or fall simply by behaving as though they have already risen or fallen. For example, researchers found that silver investors significantly affected the market in 1979 and 1980 after there were rumors about changes in the way silver shares could be held. These changes would have negatively influenced the silver market, and prices were expected to fall. Upon hearing this news, investors sold nearly all of their interests in the silver market and subsequently caused those prices to crash. By acting as though the prices had already bottomed out, the investors essentially caused that very condition to occur (Abolafia & Kilduff, 1988).

Choo (1996) specifically spoke to the constraining nature of the enacted environment through various cycles of enactment. He stated, “Because the enacted environment is based on retrospective interpretations of actions or events already

completed, it is like a historical document, stored usually as a map of relationships between events and actions, that can be retrieved and superimposed on subsequent activities” (Choo, 1996, p. 334). As a tool to reduce equivocality, the enacted environment becomes some “thing” we can look to in order to know what to do in situations where there are many possible outcomes. As we will see in the analysis below, the Bible and Bush’s initial statement regarding federal funding for embryonic stem cell research are those equivocality-reducing, historical documents to which Bush turned to make his 2006 decision to veto H.R. 810.

Weick argued that enactment is a theoretical synthesis of the self-fulfilling prophecy, retrospective sensemaking, commitment, and social information processing literatures. In the context of George W. Bush and federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, the commitment and the social information processing aspects of enactment are particularly relevant. Bush’s social information processing as an evangelical Christian, and his commitment to the evangelical community, led him to see the processes required for embryonic stem cell research as a sinful act. Bush also framed himself as a strong, decisive leader, and his commitment to that notion throughout his presidency caused him to remain consistent on his policy stances for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. Before diving too far into this argument, however, it is important to look to Weick for further information on the constructs of social information processing and commitment.

Salancik (1977, p. 62) defined commitment as “a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain

the activities and his own involvement.” In other words, commitment occurs when people become tied to a course of action and that serves to justify that same course of action. Weick (1986), following Salancik (1977), argued that there are three factors that play a role in commitment to a decision: visibility, irrevocability, and volition. As the President of the United States, Bush’s policy actions are generally visible. While there are, of course, policies of which the public is unaware, policies surrounding embryonic stem cell research in this administration are highly visible. Additionally, vetoes are by definition volitional; the president must intentionally choose to strike down a bill. These factors work together to strengthen commitment to a course of action because volitional, public, and irrevocable actions are extremely hard to undo. As Weick (2001, p. 229) argued, explanations that “justify committed actions are often stronger than beliefs developed under other, less involving conditions.” Once presidents have committed to public action, “the explanation [for that action] tends to persist and become transformed into an assumption that is taken for granted” (Weick, 2001, p. 229). In that way, the organization’s past constrains future decisions that may be made. One could argue that presidential decisions are not completely irrevocable; based on Bush’s continued stance toward federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, however, I argue below that the 2006 veto is symbolically irrevocable. Bush’s commitment to his 2001 stance was, then, at least partially related to issues of visibility, irrevocability, and volition. As I argue later, commitment to the Bush style of decisive, unquestioning leadership added a second layer of commitment to the decision to veto H.R. 810.

Social information processing is an essential component of the enacted environment because it gives organizational members a way to reduce fragmentation and dissolution, especially in the case of tightly coupled organizations like the Bush administration. Enactment is a social process and as part of a community or an organization, we become accountable to that group when we explain our actions. Salancik and Pfeffer (1978, p. 233) “argue that the social context is crucial for sensemaking because it binds people to actions that they then must justify, it affects the saliency of information, and it provides norms and expectations that constrain explanations” (quoted in Weick, 1995, p. 53). Our social relationships, then, guide us to relevant pieces of data that are used to construct justifications that fit with the expectations of the group. This notion of social information processing can be applied to several aspects of the relationship between the Bush White House and the evangelical community. First, Weick (1985, p. 23) argued that social systems have “some degree of uniformity of belief.” As will be discussed below, both evangelicals and the Bush administration certainly have strong uniformity regarding the definitions of life and leader. Second, organizations must have “some degree of acceptance of leadership and traditional authority” (Weick, 1985, p. 23), and the evangelical community in particular accepts Bush as authoritative leader. Finally, organizations must have the “willingness to participate in collective action” (Weick, 1985, p. 23). The number of evangelical voters in 2000 and 2004 indicate that they are willing to participate in the collective action necessary to elect and retain an evangelical president. Each of these factors

contributes to the cohesiveness of the group as a whole and speaks to the importance of shared information processing.

Method

In order to clarify and explicate this line of thinking and relate it more directly to federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, I turn to a more thorough analysis of the ongoing stem cell debate in the U.S. To provide context, I will briefly review the history and arguments surrounding stem cell research, considering both political and religious positions on the topic. The bulk of the analysis, however, will focus on Weick's understanding of commitment and social information processing as they relate the enacted environment and this case. For information on the Bush administration's position regarding federal funding for embryonic stem cells, I looked to statements made by Bush and members of the administration, as well as magazine and newspaper articles. In addition, I paid particular attention to books, newspaper articles, and statements that discussed Bush's religious beliefs, the influence of evangelical Christians on the 2000 and 2004 elections, Bush's leadership style, and the term "flip-flopper" introduced in the 2004 election. All of these sources allowed me to thoroughly explore the enacted stem cell environment.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research

The story of embryonic stem cell research begins with a related field of study—infertility medicine. In July of 1978, Louise Brown, the first "test tube" baby, was born in the United Kingdom, and the United States subsequently began to form committees and advisory boards to help establish policy recommendations and guidelines for

research conducted on human embryos. Congress created the Ethics Advisory Board (EAB) to research federal funding for embryonic research, and before Brown had reached her first birthday, the EAB recommended that federal support be provided for a wide range of embryonic research—including the creation of human embryos solely for research purposes. The EAB’s charter was allowed to expire, however, before any policy recommendations were acted upon, and this virtually ended all discussions of federal funding for embryonic research in the United States. The reason is best summarized by biomedical ethicist Ronald Green (2001, p. 3): “Since U.S. law required that all research in this area supported by the [National Institutes of Health] or other federal agencies be reviewed by the EAB, the result was a *de facto* moratorium on federal support for embryo research in this country.”

This freeze remained in effect until 1993 when Congress nullified the EAB approval requirement for federal funds and, backed by the Clinton administration, the Human Embryo Research Panel was formed to respond to the influx of proposals coming to the NIH. The panel consisted of 19 members and included embryologists, physicians, biomedical ethicists (including Green), lawyers, a sociologist, political scientists, and parties with “special interest” in embryo research—an infertility research advocate and the mother of a child with sickle cell anemia. In the same year, President Clinton “used his executive power to authorize the use of tissues from aborted fetuses as a source of transplant material for research” on a variety of diseases—something that the NIH had been encouraging for several years (Green, 2001, p. 1). It was not until 1998, however, that the issue of embryonic stem cells moved from the theoretical to the actual.

In that year, James Thomson and researchers at the University of Wisconsin produced the first lines of human embryonic stem cells derived from extra embryos frozen at fertility clinics. These lines were essentially privatized—their creation and commercial use were paid for by (and paid *to*) the U.S. corporation Geron—because federal funds could not be approved for Thomson’s research. In 1996 Congress had passed a preemptory bill outlawing federal funding for embryonic research, requiring Thomson and others like him to conduct their research in separate labs constructed, staffed, and supplied with money provided by private donors.

For better or for worse, this is still the state of embryonic stem cell research in the United States, largely because of the continuous and emotional debate regarding the moral status of the embryo. When does a person become a person? What rights (both legal and moral) should be afforded to a collection of cells that under proper circumstances may become a person? These are the questions that have circulated through the medical, religious, political, and legal communities. In the U.S., the fate of those questions lies with the president. As the arbiter of federal funds, presidents (excluding Bill Clinton) since the late 1970s have implicitly stated that funds will not be available for embryonic research in general. Although there was no official “ban” or statute forbidding embryonic research, Congress made sure that funding was not available by allowing the EAB charter to expire. Clinton took the first piecemeal step toward crafting the United States’ research policy, but no president until George W. Bush made a formal, explicit, and legal statement regarding the availability of federal funds for stem cell research that would guide the rest of his presidency. Clinton did state

that federal funds would be available for research, but this statement had no real impact on the state of science as the proclamation was made just months before he left office. Bush's stance, therefore, made a stronger point, and, as I argue below, his initial and current positions on the topic are highly tied to facets of the enacted environment.

Because the debate regarding federal funding takes place on philosophical and religious grounds, it is perhaps not surprising that the enacted environment has played a central role in policy formation. To gain further insight into how the enacted environment has affected President Bush's decisions, I engage in a bit of retrospective sensemaking of my own. Starting with Bush's first statements regarding embryonic stem cell research and through Bush's first presidential veto, I look for the ways in which commitment to constituencies and a particular picture of leadership have constrained each decision made by Bush. I argue that because of these commitments, and the events of the 2004 election, Bush's decision to veto H.R. 810 was really a non-decision. For one who is attuned to the influence of the enacted environment, the result was predictable.

George W. Bush and Stem Cells

Although George W. Bush rarely spoke about stem cell policy in the campaign leading up to the 2000 election, he did speak in his transition to the presidency about the topic of embryonic research. His comments highlighted the constraining nature of the enacted environment by tying together the issues of embryonic research and abortion. As spokesperson Ari Fleischer told reporters in January of 2001 (Holland, p. B4), “Bush said he would oppose federally funded research or experimentation on

embryonic stem cells that require live embryos to be discarded or destroyed.”

Conceivably, as a president who is pro-life, any action that takes away from potential life cannot be supported. A few days later the *Chicago Sun-Times* (2001, p. 9) reported that Bush believed that “federal money should not be used for research on fetal tissue or on so-called stem cells derived from abortions.” Instead, he stated that federal funds would only be provided for research conducted on fetuses that had died as the result of spontaneous abortion, a position that members of the medical community found to be unreliable and untenable. Although the prospect of using aborted fetuses for research may sound macabre, tissues and cells harvested from aborted fetuses have been central to medical research for decades and have led to such breakthroughs as polio vaccines and our current fertility treatments. In order to continue to make advances in medical therapies of all kinds, scientists need to learn what causes infertility and disease. The best way to do this is to study fetuses and embryos at various stages of development. Following Bush’s guidelines, growth in the field would be slow at best, completely stopped at worst.

This stance represented an important change from the Clinton administration. On August 23, 2000, Bill Clinton announced that federal funding would be available for embryonic stem cell research as long as that research met several requirements (Leonard, 2000a; Weiss, 2000). First, the stem cells must come from previously frozen embryos that were slated for destruction at fertility clinics. Any stem cells that came from fresh embryos were excluded. Second, the fertility patients must give consent for the embryos to be used in research. Third, federal funds may not be used to extract stem cells from

an embryo; they may only be used to study stem cells that were extracted with the use of private funds. In this way the Clinton administration circumvented the 1996 law prohibiting federal funding for stem cell research by stating no federal monies could be used to actually destroy a human embryo. Many Americans felt that this was a subversive act that bypassed the intent of the law, but it became a loophole which Clinton advocated. As expected, grant proposals began to flood the National Institutes of Health less than one month before the 2000 election. Undoubtedly scientists, doctors, and abortion opponents alike eagerly anticipated the court decision to determine who would become the 43rd president of the United States: Gore, who supported Clinton's position on stem cell research, or Bush, who opposed federal funding.

Bush did not make any formal statements or executive orders regarding stem cell research, however, until August 9, 2001. In the first televised speech of his presidency, Bush discussed the respect he had for both science and life and talked at length about the difficulty of his decision. He revealed his official stance on federal funding as he stated (Bush, 2001a):

As a result of private research, more than 60 genetically diverse stem cell lines already exist. They were created from embryos that have already been destroyed, and they have the ability to regenerate themselves indefinitely, creating ongoing opportunities for research. I have concluded that we should allow federal funds to be used for research on these existing stem cell lines, where the life-and-death decision has already been made.

Bush would permit federal funding for embryonic stem cell research; there would, however, be great restrictions placed on that research.

Reactions to this decision ranged from shock to anger to pleasant surprise on all sides of the debate. The *Washington Post* declared that even limited funding “could mark the beginning of a major boon to research” (Weiss, 2001, p. A01). California Representative Zoe Lofgren, however, saw the decision differently. Lofgren told the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sandalow, 2001, p. A1) that Bush’s decision was “‘not a compromise at all. It’s simply throwing a sop to the right wing and does nothing for research.’” Part of the range of reactions by the scientific community was related to the number of stem cell lines Bush claimed was in existence. Doug Melton, the chairman of the department of cellular and molecular biology at Harvard, told the *New York Times* (Toner, 2001, p. A17), “he was surprised by Mr. Bush’s assertion that 60 cell lines were already available for research.” Melton felt the number of lines available was closer to 10, with “‘only one or two’” of those robust enough to be used for extensive medical research. Lawrence Soler, chairman of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, was similarly puzzled. He stated of the federal funding, “‘It’s good news and a little bit of a question mark. There’s a lot more information that came up tonight [in Bush’s speech] that our scientists didn’t know about’” (quoted in Toner, 2001, p. A17). While many researchers were disappointed with the limits Bush placed on federal funding, most felt that “it could have been a lot worse” (Weiss, 2001, p. A01).

Reactions to Bush’s decision were just as varied on the conservative side of the spectrum. David Keene, head of the American Conservative Union, stated of the

decision, “‘It’s unhappiness but not outrage’” (Milbank, 2001, p. A01) on the part of conservative leaders. He continued, “‘You’ll get grouching, you may even get screaming, but at the end of the day [conservative leaders] will probably be with [Bush]’” (Milbank, 2001, p. A01). Carrie Gordon Earll, a bioethics analyst at Focus on the Family, was even more supportive of Bush’s decision. She stated that the group was “‘pleasantly surprised with this [decision],’” and continued,

“‘What [Bush] is talking about is using cell lines with embryos that have already been killed. We grieve the loss of those embryos, but the truth is they are gone, and we can’t change that. He is not talking about destroying any more with the involvement of federal dollars.’” (quoted in Seelye, 2001, p. A1)

President of the Family Research Council Ken Connor disagreed. He argued, “‘Moral principles are not divisible. Killing human embryos for research is wrong in every instance. The president is only stepping deeper into the moral morass’” (Sandalow, 2001, p. A1). Judie Brown, president of the American Life League, further and most poignantly argued, “‘[Bush] can no longer describe himself as pro-life’” (Toner, 2001, p. A17). Despite this wide range of feelings and statements, Earll summed up the response to Bush’s proposal in a manner surprisingly similar to that of scientists. She told the *New York Times*, “‘It could have been worse’” (Seelye; 2001, p. A1).

Scientists, activists, and politicians lived in a relative truce on the subject until July 19, 2006, when President Bush for the first time exercised his power to veto H.R. 810, also known as the “Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005.” The bill, sponsored by Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Michael Castle (R-DE), would have extended

the federal funds available for embryonic stem cell research by providing funds for new lines of stem cells. The bill specified that only frozen embryos at fertility clinics that were otherwise slated for destruction would be permitted in medical research. In addition, the fertility patients must provide written consent for the donation of the embryo, and they would not be eligible to receive funding in exchange for the embryo—essentially the same proposal that Clinton instituted in 2000. Despite these limitations and the approval of anywhere from 60-72% of the American public (Saad, 2006; Weiss, 2006), Bush vetoed the bill just one day after it passed in the Senate. Bush stated that he valued the “tremendous possibility that science offers” to improve medical treatments and therapies, but he also said that “we must remember that embryonic stem cells come from human embryos that are destroyed for their cells. Each of these human embryos is a unique human life with inherent dignity and matchless value” (Bush, 2006b). He further argued that the “balanced approach” outlined in his 2001 speech had contributed to medical progress (see *Setting the record straight*, 2006, for the White House’s claims about the effectiveness of the policy) and that H.R. 810 was a bill that “fails to meet [the] ethical test” of promoting medical science in an “ethical and morally responsible way” (Bush, 2006b; see *Fact Sheet*, 2006, for a more detailed analysis of Bush’s position on stem cells).

Bush stated that he would veto this bill when it first passed in the House of Representatives in 2005, but we were left to wonder how he went from a seemingly moderate position in 2001 to such an adamant one in 2006. Why would he so wholeheartedly oppose legislation supported by a majority of the American people and

even abortion rights opponents such as Bill Frist (R-TN), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Orin Hatch (R-UT)? I argue that the answer can be found in the enacted environment, particularly the ways in which commitment and social information processing work together to buttress two particularly strong enacted environments—those of the evangelical community and Bush’s idea of leadership. Commitment to an evangelical constituency and a specific notion of what it means to be a leader is reinforced by a common bracketing of information concerning what constitutes “life” and what it means to be a “flip-flopper.” Thus, the constraining nature of the enacted environment inevitably led Bush to oppose any bill brought to his desk that called for relaxed standards for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

There is evidence that Bush’s 2006 continued stance on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research is a consequence of a very specific and particular enacted environment rather than simply a reflection of Bush’s position as the elected voice of the populace. The *Gallup News Service* reported in 2001 that 60% of Americans agreed with Bush’s decision to limit federal funding for stem cell research (Jones, 2001). By 2006, however, 60% of Americans felt that stem cells taken from embryos should be used in medical research, and these preferences crossed over party lines (Saad, 2006). In addition, 42% of Americans felt the government should ease current restrictions on stem cells research and 11% believed that there should be no restriction at all. Only 24% of Americans believed that the government should keep the current restrictions regulating stem cell research in place (Saad, 2006). Despite the change in popular opinion, the president’s opinion stayed the same.

The constraining nature of the enacted environment was further demonstrated by a second veto on federal funding that occurred in 2007. At that time, Gallup polls found that “most Americans feel that embryonic stem cell research is morally acceptable, favor easing the current restrictions on stem cell research, and believe the president should not veto the new legislation” (Carroll, 2007). The 2007 poll is notable because, as stated by the *Gallup News Service* (Carroll, 2007),

Democrats and independents have consistently been more likely than Republicans to believe the government should end or ease restrictions on stem cell research funding. But Republicans are more supportive of looser restrictions in the current poll than in [2004 and 2005].

Support for easing restrictions among Republicans jumped from about 36% in 2004 and 2005 to 45% in 2007, and this was reflected by the number of notable Republicans who asked Bush to rethink his position before the 2006 veto. As the *Washington Post* (Milbank, 2006, p. A2) reported,

Thus did Bush find Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) ...on the Senate floor yesterday comparing the president’s position to those who opposed Columbus, locked up Galileo, and rejected anesthesia, electricity, vaccines and rail travel. Such attitudes “in retrospect look foolish, look absolutely ridiculous,” said Specter, daring Bush to join them.

Bold statements such as these, and Bush’s refusal to heed them, indicate that there was something going on beyond the obvious in Bush’s decision to veto stem cell research expansion, and I argue that the “something” at work was the enacted environment. Bush

views the world through evangelical eyes, and his commitment to this worldview and this constituency had a significant impact on his decisions concerning federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

To support my arguments about the enacted environment and its influence on Bush's stance regarding federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, I draw from a wide variety of sources including newspaper reports, popular magazines and articles, academic journal articles, the White House webpage and its archives, books written by experts in related fields, and television programs. For background and arguments concerning evangelism (both in general and specific to Bush), I relied heavily on *Frontline's* 2004 program, "Jesus Factor." The variety and depth of interviews conducted by the program's producer provide an integral understanding of evangelism and how Bush is situated in relation to the movement.

Commitment, Social Information Processing, and the Religious Right

The story of George W. Bush's involvement with the evangelical "born again" right began in Midland, Texas, in the fall of 1985. Bush was 39 years old, married, and had twin girls. He also had a drinking problem. In order to save his marriage and his children, Bush joined the Midland chapter of Community Bible Study, and it was there that he found Jesus (Aronson, 2004). As Wayne Slater, *Dallas Morning News* reporter and long-time follower of Bush's career, stated (Aronson & Slater, 2003 & 2004),

Bush believes very much in the core ideas of Christianity—the belief that you must believe in Jesus in order to go to heaven, that there is no other way to salvation.... That's a fundamental belief, and he embraces it. He believes in the

absolute nature of God. Fundamentally, he believes in the existence of evil, not as an abstract idea, a philosophy, but as something that's real and tangible.

The belief in the importance of accepting Jesus as one's savior and the belief in "tangible" good and evil are shared by members of the evangelical community. The belief in tangible evil is particularly noteworthy as it implies that people, policies, and actions can be objectively evil. Policy making, then, becomes an exercise in morality.

In addition to the central tenets of evangelism, as *Frontline* (Aronson, 2004) reported in an in-depth analysis of Bush's religiosity, "Conservative evangelicals consider the Bible to be the word of God, and without error, and reading it daily is more important even than going to church." This is true of Bush who was a lively participant in the Midland Community Bible Study but infrequent church attendee. As Don Poage, a member of Bush's core bible study group, told *Frontline* (Aronson, Leaverton & Poage, n.d.),

[George] asked great questions. But George had a very incisive mind. He didn't ask trivial questions.... You could tell by the way he asked his questions and the way he approached his lessons and the preparation he'd done work outside there. He really did seek to know himself.

According to Steve Waldman (Aronson & Waldman, 2003, ¶15-116), the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the widely respected Webpage *Beliefnet*, evangelical bible study groups are

not just about theology. It's not just about memorizing what this passage said or didn't say. It's usually about taking a passage and thinking about how it applies

in your life and how it applies to the rest of the world. You're supposed to look at the Bible as a blueprint for your life today and not just as a sacred text in its own right. And so, Bush, if he was taking his Bible study seriously, would be thinking not only about what was written, but what his obligations were as a Christian to the rest of society.

Through the process of reading and analyzing the Bible, as well as contemplating how it influences self and others, one comes to understand the world in a certain way. This is not, however, a personal endeavor as much as it is a communal one. Through the lessons of a conservative reading of the Bible and discussions of its meaning, large segments of the evangelical community often bracket information in similar ways. This has clear connections to social information processing on a community scale—a macro enacted environment.

With this emphasis on the Bible comes an emphasis on morality for many conservative evangelicals. John Green, a researcher and pollster on the intersection of politics and evangelism, summarized,

The issue of abortion and other social and sexual issues are especially important to evangelical Protestants, because of the emphasis that their religion puts on traditional morality. They have a strong support for the nuclear family, what they see as the traditional family. They put great stress on individual morality and personal behavior. The pro-choice position on abortion goes directly against those particular values. (Aronson & Green, 2003)

Already we can see how this particular social information processing regarding Christianity and the Bible would influence Bush's stance for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. As one who shares a belief in tangible evil and sees that evil in abortion, as well as one who feels that his individual actions on the subject must be in line with the morals of the community, he faced a fundamental pressure to do what was right. He was accountable to himself, his community, and his God. With such an emphasis on family and morality, the decision to fund the destruction of embryos became personally and politically untenable.

The traditional view held by many religious leaders and followers is that "life begins at conception" (for a diverse overview of stem cell research from religious, feminist, and bioethics perspectives see Holland, Lebacqz, & Zoloth, 2001; for an in-depth analysis of the Christian and historical philosophical perspectives see Jones, 2004). Indeed, this has been the pro-life movement's mantra for decades, and it was also mentioned by Richard Land, a director of the Southern Baptist Convention. He stated of Bush, "He believes that the Bible is very clear that life begins at conception, that God is involved when conception takes place, which is what the Bible clearly teaches" (Aronson & Land, 2003 & 2004, ¶27).

In contrast to Land's position, bioethicist Ronald Green argued that there is no "moment" of conception. He stated, "If life begins at conception,... then conception must be something be obvious. It would be nice if this were true. But our increasing understanding of biology does not support it" (Green, 2001, p. 20-21). To a scientist, conception is a complex process with very murky boundaries. Human eggs can send

chemical messages to sperm to help lead them to the egg, the head of the sperm punctures the egg cell, the sperm enters the egg cell (during which time other sperm that penetrate the egg may be ejected by the egg cell), the chromosomes from the egg and sperm align (syngamy), and the cells begin to divide. Although any of these “moments” could be said to constitute conception, there are problems with stating that life begins with each potential candidate. With chemical messaging, there has been no physical contact between sperm and egg. The fact that eggs can reject extra chromosomes (sperm) indicates that the egg is still very flexible in the first few hours of fertilization. During syngamy chromosomes are aligned, but the cell has no nuclear membrane, meaning that it cannot be biologically defined as a cell at all. And finally, chromosomes do not come into play until after the first four to eight cell divisions; an unfertilized egg can divide several times as a result of electronic stimulation.

This process of determining the boundaries of life may seem unique to stem cell research and embryology, but similar questions have recently been asked about death, an event that seemed definitive for centuries. Cases such as that of Terry Schiavo indicate that death is to some degree a matter of choice. Does brain stem function alone count as life? Or is it an indicator of death? As medical technology continues to advance, and humans ostensibly have the power to expand the boundaries of life, we must constantly make difficult decisions about the natural, biological processes that constitute human life.

Green argued that because these events truly are matters of life and death, we must think carefully about our where we place these boundaries. He asked,

[W]hy not place them in their most generous locations?... Why not push the margin as far out as possible to prevent mistreatment of those departing life? The answer, of course, is that every boundary extension carries a price. These are not cost-free decisions. (Green, 2001, p.37)

The costs for Schiavo and her family were immense and made very public. In the case of the beginning boundary of life, Green (2001, p. 47) argued,

Sperm penetration, syngamy, or some other candidate for the ‘moment of fertilization’ may, in fact, be spiritually significant. No one can say this is untrue. But religious views such as these cannot be the basis for public policy in a pluralistic, religiously diverse society.

Although this is generally good advice from Green, it is not always easy in practice—especially if one fundamentally believes that the destruction of an embryo is tantamount to taking a life.

This opposing view is articulated by conservative evangelicals. As Land described to *Frontline* (Aronson & Land, 2003 & 2004),

If you believe that unborn human beings are human beings, that they are living human beings, that their hearts are beating, that they have brain waves, that the only difference between them and us is time and the opportunity to not be destroyed, then we believe we have a moral and civic obligation to extend the protections of the law to unborn human beings.

One of the counterarguments to this, of course, is that fertilized eggs do not have heart beats or brain waves, nor do they have the possibility of heart beats or brain waves if

left to develop on their own. Until they reach 14 days of age, embryos are stuck in a potentially infinite state of human/non-human flux. They consist of undifferentiated cells, meaning that they conceivably could be split an infinite number of times to form new embryos in a type of asexual reproduction. For this reason, some refer to embryos less than 14 days of age as “pre-embryos”; they do not yet have any unique, individual human characteristics. The possibility of unique genomes arising from pre-embryos comes to a definitive end 14 days after fertilization when cells become “committed to specialized fates,” meaning cells have differentiated. Most ethicists and medical researchers point to cell differentiation as the phase of development in which embryos demonstrate some form of human uniqueness. At this stage embryos are much less useful for stem cell research because the quality that made them prized in the first place—their pluripotency—is by definition greatly diminished.

The other counterargument to Land’s statement is that the embryos (or pre-embryos) used in medical research belong to the over 400,000 extra embryos that are frozen and slated for destruction in fertility clinics in the United States. As James Thomson, the researcher who first isolated embryonic stem cells, stated,

“If this research is completely blocked, how many embryos will have been saved? The answer is none.... The ethically inappropriate choice would be to throw them out when there is the possibility of using them to help a lot of people.” (quoted in Schmickel, 2000, p. 22A)

One response to this line of thought has been to promote embryo donation, or what some (including Bush) call “embryo adoption.” In 2005, as a statement against the

House's then-pending vote on H.R. 810, President Bush held a press conference where 21 children born from adopted embryos and their families were invited to show support for this "life-affirming alternative" to the destruction of embryos required for embryonic stem cell research. He stated,

I believe America must pursue the tremendous possibilities of science, and I believe we can do so while still fostering and encouraging respect for human life in all its stages. In the complex debate over embryonic stem cell research, we must remember that real human lives are involved—both the lives of those with diseases that might find cures from this research, and the lives of the embryos that will be destroyed in the process. The children here today are reminders that every human life is a precious gift of matchless value. (Bush, 2005f)

He then referred to the "life begins at conception" argument when he stated, "The children here today remind us that there is no such thing as a spare embryo. Every embryo is unique and genetically complete, like every other human being" (Bush, 2005f). According to President Bush, embryo donation agencies had then worked with 140 adoptive families to give birth to 81 children by the year 2005.

Within the context of the enacted environment, there are many ways in which information is bracketed and linked together, many ways in which a community shares an understanding of life and afterlife, that have a constraining effect on the debates over the federal funding for embryonic stem cell research in the United States. By taking a literal interpretation of the Bible and a conservative understanding of conception, Bush found himself in a situation in which federal funding for this research was personally

problematic at best. The bind was exponentially increased by not just a shared way of understanding the world with the religious right, but by his strong commitment to that particular constituency. With this added pressure, federal funding for stem cell research moved from the realm of the personally problematic to the politically untenable. Through an examination of the ways in which Bush commits to the conservative, religious right, we see that this facet of the enacted environment has constrained and continues to constrain Bush's possible stances in the stem cell debate.

Bush accomplished the task of letting the evangelical community know that he was committed to them in very public ways including through policy, personnel, and speeches. Before delving into an analysis of Bush's commitment to the evangelical constituency, it is necessary to look at the importance that base has had in political history.

Starting with Jimmy Carter, our first "born again" president, the Christian Right began to coalesce and gain strength in American politics. This growing constituency became a stronghold of the Republican Party and religious affiliation became an important predictor of how one would vote. Things began to change, however, in the last decade of the 20th century. As Mark Silk, Director of the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, noted in the forward to John Green's book, *Faith Factor*,

Beginning in the 1990s, if you were someone who attended religious services of any kind once a week or more, you were significantly more likely to vote Republican than Democratic. The reverse was also true: You were significantly

more likely to vote Democratic if your attendance was less than once a week. By 2000, this new religion gap, which professional pollsters had been aware of for some years, was considerably larger than the better known gender gap. It caught the news media's attention during George W. Bush's first term not only because of its size but because the Bush presidency supplied such good evidence for it.

(Silk in Green, 2007, p. xii)

Many of the people who attend religious services at least once a week are the most conservative evangelical Christians, so by the time planning for the 2000 elections began, political advisers like Karl Rove amended the importance of these voters: not only did a Republican candidate need this constituency to win, it might be possible to become president with solely the evangelical vote. At that time, Bush began his outright wooing of the growing base, and they continued to greatly contribute to his success in 2004. As Green (2007, p. 41) stated, "Evangelical Protestants were the single largest part of President Bush's vote coalition in 2004, accounting for nearly two-fifths of all his ballots."

Bush first became acquainted with the political power his religious belief held during his father's candidacy for president. During that time, George H. W. Bush was receiving memos from Doug Wead, a campaign adviser who was guiding Bush, Sr., on the history, beliefs, and even the vernacular of the evangelical right. Little did Wead know, George W. Bush was also reading the memos that were intended for Bush, Sr. In particular Wead said,

Sometimes when we would prepare these memos for his father, we would prepare a memorandum on a region or a state. For example, one memo was like a 20-pager on the state of Texas. Who are the evangelical leaders in Texas, and why? Who to stay away from, who's radioactive. What [are] the various doctrines and denominations, what percentages, where, what major churches, and some suggestions, or techniques, or strategy, or hints. I remember [George W. Bush] reviewing the memorandum on Texas, and he just lit up. He said, "Ah, you know, I could do this in Texas. I could make it work in Texas." There was no secret he was talking about running for governor. But he'd see this, and said, "Whoa." To me, it was like the missing piece for him. (Aronson & Wead, 2003)

By the late 1990s when Bush, Jr., was himself running for president, Wead argued that "within five minutes of any meetings with evangelicals, within minutes, they instantly knew he's a born again Christian" (Aronson & Wead, 2003). Despite this level of familiarity, however, the results of the 2000 election were anything but definitive. As *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne noted less than one year before Bush's 2004 reelection,

Karl Rove, early on, said that one of the reasons the 2000 election turned out to be so close is because there was a fall-off in the white evangelical vote. He's quite clear that he and the president are determined that that's not going to happen again. (Aronson & Dionne, 2003)

As we have already seen, evangelicals did vote more heavily for Bush in 2004, demonstrating their importance to the Republican Party and to George W. Bush. In the

process, Bush had publicly aligned himself with evangelicals both by speaking the language of evangelicals and through policy and personnel decisions.

Bush's first memorable statement that forged his commitment to the evangelical community occurred in December of 1999. In a Republican debate, each candidate for the nomination was asked what political thinker or philosopher he identified with most. Bush famously answered, "'Christ, because he changed my heart'" (quoted in Buttry, 1999). The moderator of the debate pressed Bush to say more, and he responded, "'When you turn your heart and your life over to Christ, when you accept Christ as the savior, it changes your heart. It changes your life. And that's what happened to me'" (quoted in Buttry, 1999). As John Green told *Frontline*, that statement, although not politically advisable for most candidates, "did have a very important political effect. Evangelical Christians and other conservative Protestants immediately understand what he was talking about, and they began to identify with President Bush" (Aronson & Green, 2003, 136). Throughout his presidency, a majority of evangelical Christians continued to identify with Bush and he with them. Below I discuss the ways in which Bush has publicly signaled his commitment to this important constituency through artifacts, speeches, personnel, and policy.

One of Bush's favorite Methodist hymns is Charles Wesley's "A Charge to Keep," and this hymn played a central role in Bush's presidency. Not only was it the title of his campaign autobiography, but it became a personal motto—a guiding quote—for the Bush White House. As John Green told *Frontline* (Aronson & Green, 2003), "I think it reveals Bush to come from very much out of the Methodist tradition, with this

connection of personal discipline, worldly mission and personal conversion.” The hymn is so important Bush had it placed on a plaque behind his desk as a reminder of the charge he has to keep. For evangelical Christians, the story of Wesley’s conversion experience mirrors Bush’s own and provides a sense of unity between themselves, their leaders of the past, and the leader of today.

“A Charge to Keep” and other hymns have found homes in other parts of the Bush administration, most notably in Bush’s speeches. Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson was a graduate of Wheaton College and an evangelical Christian. As Green stated, Gerson “knows how to take religious texts and religious symbols and embed them into speeches, even speeches about fairly dry policy measures” (Aronson & Green, 2003). Of particular note was Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address in which he used the phrase “wonder-working power.” According to Waldman (Aronson & Waldman, 2003), “There was much made of the fact that that was a clever way of signaling, ‘I’m one of you guys’ to evangelicals at the same time it sounded neutral to the rest of population.” The phrase comes again from an evangelical hymn by Lewis E. Jones called “Power in the Blood.” In the hymn, the power comes from the blood of Jesus; it is a sacrificial blood that has the power to cleanse believers of their sins. Although the phrase taken from its musical context sounds like the general “God-talk” that is common among presidents and politicians through history, Waldman argued that “this certain language turns on light bulbs over the heads of certain voters” (Aronson & Waldman, 2003; see also Campbell, 2007). The importance of this particular type of religious

rhetoric was also reinforced by E. J. Dionne. He recounted this story to *Frontline* (Aronson & Dionne, 2003):

I remember when Bush in the famous debate in Iowa said that Jesus Christ was his favorite political philosopher. I always thought the problem was not with that answer, which is a legitimate answer. But when he was asked to explain this, he basically said, "If you haven't had this experience, you don't know what it is." I was offended by that, because I thought, in a sense, in a tolerant democracy, a politician has an obligation to explain things to people who don't necessarily accept their religious terms. I had an assistant at the time who was a Democrat, no friend of Bush's but an evangelical Christian. She was upset with me, because she said, "That's how we talk. You should understand that." I think it's these moments, when Bush speaks like that, that evangelicals know in their hearts that he's one of them.

This indicates that embedded in the very way Bush speaks and the content of his rhetoric is a fundamental commitment to the evangelical Christians in America. This leads them to feel a connection to President Bush. According to Waldman (Aronson & Waldman, 2003),

Evangelicals view Bush as one of them, on a very personal level. They just feel like he understands their personal experience. He's had it. He's been on the same journey that they have. And there's a tremendous bond between evangelical voters, many of them, and Bush, for that reason.

Although this connection is frequently referenced in speeches and public statements, some, such as Richard Cizik, a prominent member of the National Association of Evangelicals, argued that the connection transcends communication. He told *Frontline* (Aronson & Cizik, 2003),

This president somehow—and I think his staff—have the heartbeat of evangelicals. So we don't need to be constantly calling up the White House, or whatever, lobbying them on behalf of our agenda. I think that we see eye to eye. They understand how we think.

Not all evangelicals, however, are pleased with the messages they read in between the lines of Bush's rhetoric. Liberal evangelical leader Jim Wallis, for one, expressed great concern that Bush's hymnological tendency diminished the meaning behind the original texts. He pointed to Bush's speech at Ellis Island on the first anniversary of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center as a prime example. He stated,

[Bush] talked about how America stands as a beacon of light to the world, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Well, that's in the Gospel of John. But the light there is the word of God, and the light is Christ, not the beacon of American freedom. So there are hymns being altered and put in a different context. I think what you see now is more an American civil religion than evangelical biblical faith.... That's bad theology. It confuses American civil and biblical faith. It confuses church and nation. It confuses God's purposes with the best interest for American foreign policy, so there's

confusion here. It's bad theology and bad foreign policy at the same time.

(Aronson & Wallis, 2003, 39-40)

Whether or not there is confusion or confluence, it is clear that even those who disagree with the sentiment written into Bush's speeches can recognize that it is there and that it is meaningful. This places great pressure on the President to remain committed to the constituency to whom the secondary (and yet perhaps more meaningful) message is directed. It would not be appropriate, for example, to use the "wonder-working power" to promote embryonic stem cell research. Because the president's rhetoric is filled with examples of evangelical turns of phrase, the policies he promotes must be compatible with an evangelical understanding of the world.

Another way Bush indicates his commitment to the evangelical right is through his personnel decisions. As previously mentioned, Gerson was an evangelical Christian, and Bush's first attorney general, John Ashcroft, was also evangelical. Specifically, Ashcroft is a Pentecostal—a particularly conservative denomination—and his appointment sent a very strong signal to the religious right. As Green (Aronson & Green, 2003) stated,

One could argue that the appointment of John Ashcroft represents the highest rank that any card-carrying evangelical has ever held in an administration. That appointment was extremely important to the evangelical community, because it signaled very early on that President Bush was not going to take them for granted, and was going to pay attention to at least some salient elements of their agenda.

Although Ashcroft is no longer the attorney general, the questions surrounding federal judges appointed by Bush demonstrates that the Bush administration has certainly left its mark on the judicial branch of government.

Perhaps the most immediate way in which the Bush administration has demonstrated its commitment to the religious right is through policy making. At times in the first administration, Bush “would do something to reinforce and remind evangelicals who’ve been part of his political base [that] he’s their guy” (Aronson & Slater, 2003). Some of these initiatives included establishing a National Day of Prayer, starting the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives—one of the few times an explicitly faith-oriented organization has had an office in the White House—and reinstatement of the international gag rule on U.S. foreign aid fund, also known as the “Mexico City Policy.” The gag rule states that any non-governmental organization that receives funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development may not use any funds (including those from other sources) to: 1) provide any legal abortion services other than to treat the woman’s health or in cases of rape or incest; 2) lobby their own government for abortion law reform; or 3) provide counseling or referrals for abortion services (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2003).

Each of these acts signaled Bush’s commitment to this important constituency, and each of his decisions regarding federal funding for embryonic stem cell research was no different. In case Bush was unaware that this was an extremely important issue, conservative evangelicals let him know just how vital his decision would be. Jim

Winkler, the general secretary of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society, wrote in a 2001 letter to President Bush,

“You have promised to make a decision regarding the use of federal tax dollars to support embryonic stem cell research.”... That decision “can maintain the current prohibition on such funding or take us further down a path to the ultimate commodification of human life” (quoted in Broadway, 2001, p. B09).

Bush was publicly informed via newspaper ads taken out by the Life League that “if Mr. Bush reversed his campaign pledge [to not designate federal funds for embryonic research], the political consequences would be similar to those his father faced after he defaulted on the tax pledges he made during the 1988 presidential campaign” (Levy, 2001, p. 4). This threat was echoed by several pro-life activists in a letter to Bush. Ken Connor of the Family Research Council wrote that

“any abdication by President Bush of his campaign pledge to oppose embryonic research will fracture his pro-life base, which was essential to his election in the first place.... It will absolutely inhibit his ability to marshal the critical mass that he will need from his base in order to be re-elected” (quoted in Heath, 2001, p. 7A).

Prominent members of Bush's base made sure to state the official party line regarding the moral status of embryos, and the way to truly demonstrate his commitment to them was to keep federal funds away from the destruction of embryos. For the most part, he did not disappoint.

Although some people saw Bush's 2001 decision as a soft or mild compromise, other conservative leaders, such as Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention, felt that Bush made the right decision. Land told *Frontline* (Aronson & Land, 2003),

Well, on the embryonic stem cell research speech that he gave, I believe he did more in one speech to humanize unborn babies to the American people than has been done by any other one speech in the history of the country since *Roe v.*

Wade. I thought it was a magnificent speech.... I believe it was a fundamental sea change in the way American people began to look at unborn babies in the womb. He was under tremendous pressure to compromise on the embryonic stem cell research issue from Republicans, who get a lot of money from stem cell research, and who were putting enormous pressure on the president. Instead, he fulfilled his campaign promise, and gave a very principled speech with a very principled approach.

In his 2001 speech, Bush was able to reaffirm his commitment to the conservative viewpoint—that embryos are humans who deserve the full protection of the law—while still allowing medical research to advance, albeit at a slower pace than many scientists would have liked. As subsequent bills began to push the boundaries of the president's order and ask for expansion, however, the possibility of a similar compromise became unlikely. In any case where the "life or death decision" had not already been made, Bush stated he would side with his base and his faith and err on what they believed to be the side of life. H.R. 810 put Bush in exactly this predicament.

The lead-up to the 2006 veto was filled with commitment statements, both positive and negative. Bush stated publicly on several occasions before H.R. 810 reached his desk that he would veto the measure. This led Senators such as Sam Brownback, a vocal opponent of expanded stem cell research, to state that Bush had “‘been a clear man of his word’” (quoted in Abramowitz & Babington, 2006, p. A04). The *Washington Post* (Abramowitz & Babington, 2006, p. A04) observed, “By refusing to budge from his position, the president also appears to be reaffirming his bona fides with religious conservatives who make up an important part of his political base, even while he differs with other prominent Republicans.” While this stance may have made him popular with that specific base, others feared the ramifications of vetoing a bill with such support among the majority of Americans. As the *Los Angeles Times* (Hook, 2006b, p. A12) reported, “Some Republicans worry that the president’s opposition to the research will alienate swing voters—and perhaps cast the GOP as hostile to scientific programs.” Bush’s critics framed the 2006 veto “as a testament to how wedded Bush is to the agenda of religious conservatives” (Hook, 2006b, p. A12). While conservatives felt the veto would be a “powerful statement of principle,” moderate Republicans, such as Thomas Davis (R-VA), said, “‘That’s a bad issue to make your first veto’” (quoted in Hook, 2006a, p. A1) because of the political costs involved. In the end, and likely because of his dual commitments to his faith and the evangelical base, the president stayed true to his word and used his first veto to strike down H.R. 810.

Commitment, Social Information Processing, and Leadership

In the days after the 2006 veto against H. R. 810, the *Christian Science Monitor* observed, “President Bush’s veto of a stem-cell research bill on religious and moral grounds is a sign of how much faith has infused U.S. politics” (Monitor’s view, 2006, p. 8). While this is certainly true, I argue that faith alone does not account for the entirety of the enacted environment in which this decision was made. I argue that Bush’s notion of leadership, combined with the infamous 2004 campaign phrase “flip-flopping,” added a second point around which social information processing and commitment united to further constrain Bush’s options in 2006. One may, out of political necessity, have to go against the wishes of an important constituency, but with the introduction of the term “flip-flopping” into the political mix, this possibility is purged from the system. I analyzed Bush’s ideas of leadership by examining his campaign’s statements about him and his opponent in the 2004 campaign, Senator John Kerry, in order to demonstrate this powerful aspect of the enacted environment.

George W. Bush’s style of leadership may best be summarized by a statement he made to the press on April 18, 2006: “I’m the decider, and what I decide is best” (quoted in Henry & Starr). As was revealed by Woodward’s extensive interviews with Bush and other members of the administration (and discussed in Chapter III’s consideration of the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system), Bush is a person who likes to be in command and does not appreciate it when others ask him to change course once a decision has been made. Direct statements regarding leadership style were fairly rare in the 2000 campaign, with most statements directed toward either policy positions or

personal qualities (Benoit, McHale, Hansen et al., 2003), but Bush family friend Doug Wead remembered how he first reacted to the idea of George W. Bush becoming president. He told Aronson (Aronson & Wead, 2003) of *Frontline*:

I must be one of the earliest people to have ever imagined him as president.

Because when I did this memo [about the children of presidents], there are seven young sons of presidents who tried to be president themselves.... So I immediately started thinking. I mean, he's the guy I see every day, and I'm working for. So I immediately thought, "Whoa. What kind of president would he make? Oh, God, that would be funny. He's so decisive. He's so adamant, so dogmatic—makes a decision, never looks back. Oh." I thought either he'd be terrific, or he'd be terrible. But he'd sure make news.

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, these decisive qualities began to come to the forefront. The official message was that the United States needed a strong leader to guide it through economic and emotional recovery, as well as to ensure the safety of our country and the world. Although this is when Bush began to more publicly portray these strong aspects of his personality, Wead argued that these qualities had always been present. He stated (Aronson & Wead, 2003), "People said after 9/11, 'Boy, he's changed.' No. He's just exactly the same. They [are] just finding out who he is. He was always like that."

These qualities of decisiveness notably became the focus during the 2004 presidential contest between Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts and George W. Bush.

During this campaign, Bush and his supporters infamously referred to Kerry as a “flip-flopper” and contrasted this with Bush’s consistency. As Conley (2005, p. 123) stated,

From the start, Republicans emphasized Bush’s decisiveness and willingness to take a stand, one of his greatest selling points with the public.... [According to Gallup poll data], President Bush is clearly perceived to be more decisive and resolute, the candidate who “does not change his positions on issues for political reasons.”

The Bush campaign’s theme for Kerry “was twofold: Kerry was a liberal addicted to higher taxes, and he was inconsistent on national security (a ‘flip-flopper’), willing to change his positions to suit the political environment” (Caesar & Busch, 2004, p. 109). This strategy was successful. About 17% of the electorate felt that a “clear stand on issues” was the most important personal quality for the president. Of these, 79% voted for Bush, and only 20% voted for Kerry. Similarly, 11% of the electorate felt that “honest/trustworthy” was the most important quality; 70% of these voted for Bush (Caesar & Busch, 2004). As Caesar and Busch (2004, p. 139) summarized,

Leadership and willingness to take a clear stand outweighed the personal qualities of intelligence and empathy by 34 to 16%. Kerry was unable to make headway in the two areas where he needed most to do so—convincing Americans that he was a steady leader who would wage the war on terror vigorously.

The Bush strategy was clearly an effective one in terms of voters’ perceptions, and by looking closely at the content, timing, and consistency of this Bush/Kerry contrast, we can see the success of this strategy and its impact on presidential decision-making.

Throughout 2004, Bush, Cheney, and other members of the campaign were purposeful about their portrayal of the leadership styles of both Bush and Kerry. As Conley (quoted in Crotty, 2005, p. 119) stated, “Republicans had a two-part strategy: portray Kerry as a flip-flopping liberal and emphasize Bush as a strong and decisive leader who delivered results, particularly in foreign policy.” Bush told audiences at a speech in 2004,

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn’t one of those times. It’s a time where we need strong resolve and clear vision. Bush also made very clear who that leader should be. For example, in Bush’s stump speech in Battle Creek, Michigan, he stated:

I’m running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. . . . I believe this nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership and that is why, with your help, we’re going to win four more years. (Bush, 2004)

He further emphasized his strength in relation to the ongoing war in Iraq. He stated (Bush 2004), “I made a commitment to those who wear the uniform and to their loved ones that they will have the resources they need to complete their missions. They’ll have the support of our government.” For these reasons, Bush asked Congress for \$87 billion in funding, funding that Kerry notoriously voted against. This vote in particular became a point of unity for the Bush administration’s message, especially after Kerry

stated that he had voted for the funding before he had voted against it. The following exchange is typical of a Bush-Cheney rally in 2004:

Bush: Now when you're out gathering up the vote, I want you to remind people of this fact: There's [sic] only four United States senators who voted to authorize the use of force, and then voted against funding our troops.

Audience: Booo!

Bush: Only four, of 100 members—only four did that, two of whom are my opponent and his running mate.

Audience: Booo!

Bush: No, we have a difference of opinion in this race, clearly. They asked [Kerry], they said, well, why did you do that? He said, well, I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, right before I voted against it.

Audience: Flip-flop! Flip-flop! Flip-flop! (Bush, 2004)

Kerry's statement about his voting record on funding for the war in Iraq became a highlight of the Bush campaign. Not only did Bush accuse Kerry of flip-flopping, Kerry essentially proved them right with this statement. Bush finished his speech with the following: "The American President must be clear in his thinking, must mean what he says, must be resolute and firm. Now, my opponent has more different positions on the Iraq issue than all his colleagues in the Senate combined" (Bush, 2004). These messages were not subtle depictions of the strengths of Bush and the weaknesses of Kerry. They served to reinforce the notion that a leader is someone who is decisive; thoughtfulness

and debate were portrayed as weaknesses that signal an inability to be an effective leader.

Vice President Dick Cheney delivered similar messages on behalf of his ticket in 2004. He spoke about a presidential debate to a crowd in Grand Rapids, MI, and stated the following:

Let me go back to Wednesday's debate for a minute, because I thought what you saw was the character and the vision of our President. He's a man of loyalty and kindness who speaks plainly and means what he says. He sets clear goals, and he works with members of both parties to achieve them. He put the country first and his deepest commitment is to making us safer, more prosperous, and more secure. You saw something quite different in the President's opponent.... But in John Kerry, you saw a man who will say and do anything if he thinks it will advance his cause. (Cheney, 2004)

Here we see again how the Bush-Cheney campaign understood the role of the president. Because of the emphasis on commitment to a course of action and the negativity associated with changing one's mind, the range of electable candidates was narrowed: only Bush had the fortitude and strength to lead our nation. It also meant, however, that Bush would be virtually unable to reverse any decisions he made—a fact that certainly played a role in the administration's stance on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

One of the most important factors leading to “flip-flop” success was the timing of the first attack. As Benoit et al (2007, p. 170) stated,

It appears that the Bush campaign decided to attack Senator Kerry early in the campaign; ...the president started running general campaign ads in early March. Kerry was not particularly well-known then. For example, states that were general election battleground states did not hold their 2004 primary election until April or May and he had not campaigned extensively prior to March 4. It is easier to create a negative attitude than to change a positive attitude into a negative one, so it appears that the Bush campaign decided to attack Kerry before many people had made up their minds about him.

The effectiveness of the attacks against Kerry, then, appeared to be related to the fact that the Bush-Cheney campaign had the opportunity to define Kerry before he could define himself.

Further, Bush, a naturally decisive leader seasoned by the harsh reality of September 11, was easily able to draw out the contrasts between himself and Kerry. The early commitment to this strategy made a significant difference in the result of the election. As Ceasar and Busch (2004, p. 111) stated,

The consensus today is that, overall, Bush made better use of his first moment of opportunity than Kerry and laid a firmer foundation for the fall campaign. As one Democratic strategist conceded, “They went ahead of us; they had a strategy set by the beginning that they were going to live and die by, and we didn’t.”

This dedication to a definition of leadership—a particular type of social information processing—contributed greatly to Bush’s success in the election.

Not only did the Bush administration start their “flip-flopping” campaign early, they consistently presented this message throughout the duration of the campaign; they were committed to this depiction. In Benoit’s analysis of the 2004 campaign he found that Bush spent a significant amount of time attacking Senator Kerry. Although he did not specifically look for “flip-flopping” attacks, he recognized that many of the attacks were presented in that manner. As Benoit et al (2007, p. 180) stated, “When [Bush and Kerry] discussed character, they frequently tussled about personal qualities, particularly the extent to which both candidate adopted shifting positions on issues (that is, whether Kerry and Bush were flip-floppers).” As Kerry discovered, consistency—whether in votes or campaign messages—matters, and researchers such as Ceaser and Bush (2004, p. 109) agreed. They stated,

Up until his final speech on election eve in Dallas, President Bush was placing John Kerry into the “flip-flop hall of fame”—regrettably, Bush did not list the other inductees. CNN’s William Schneider, one of the nation’s most astute political analysts, attributed much of Bush’s ultimate victory to the Republican plan to “define John Kerry in a way [they] wanted and to stick with that definition for the entire campaign.”

The Bush campaign certainly worked hard to establish Kerry’s status as a flip-flopper, but Bush also worked hard to show that he was not a flip-flopper. Because of this strategic maneuvering, Bush closed himself off from approving expanded federal funding for embryonic stem cell research; to do so would cast him as no better than Kerry to his most conservative base. As the relationship with this constituency and its

important voting block must be protected, Bush had no real alternative than to veto the bill that crossed his desk in 2006—regardless of his personal views on the matter (although we have no evidence that his personal views differed from his presidential statements). To use poker terminology, by 2006, Bush was “pot committed.” He was so invested in commitment to his base and his definition of leadership that the decision had already been made.

The Enacted Environment and Stem Cell Policy

Not only were stability and commitment hallmarks of Bush’s interactions with evangelicals and descriptive of his style of leadership, phrases and statements concerning the President’s stability and consistency found their way into Bush’s stem cell rhetoric as well. At the time of the 2001 statement, Bush assured the public, “I spent a lot of time on the subject. I laid out the policy I think is right for America. And I’m not going to change my mind. I’m the kind of person that when I make up my mind, I’m not going to change it” (Bush, 2001b). Indeed, Bush stayed true to his word and vetoed H.R. 810 almost immediately after it was passed. Political scientist Robert Spitzer echoed Bush’s own words in regard to this veto. He said that Bush “‘drew a line in the sand on this one, and once he makes up his mind on something, that’s it’” (quoted in Benedetto & Stone, 2006, p. 4A). The *Christian Science Monitor* further invoked the constraining effect the 2001 decision had on future decisions regarding stem cell research funding, stating,

Analysts agree the President Bush’s veto was risky but unavoidable. Since the issue of stem-cell research arose early in his presidency, when Mr. Bush

approved federal funding of preexisting stem-cell lines, he has remained adamant that no federal monies be used on newer cell colonies” (Feldmann, 2006, p. 2).

A silver lining for this difficult decision, however, was mentioned by John Green:

““[Bush] can claim that he sticks to his principles”” (quoted in Feldmann, 2006, p. 2).

University of Texas political scientist Bruce Buchanan agreed. He told the *Los Angeles Times* (Hook, 2006c, p. A1) that Bush’s veto ““reaffirms a dimension of his political self-definition as a strong leader who does what he says he’ll do and sticks with his guns.”” The campaign language carried over to this important decision. Though brief, this one statement demonstrates the true power of the enacted environment. Bush had to avoided the label that was the hallmark of the 2004 campaign by remaining consistent on his embryonic stem cell stance.

Conclusion

As this evidence indicates, both social information processing and commitment played particularly important roles in the enacted environment regarding stem cell policy making. Bush, as a member of the evangelical Christian community, understood embryonic stem cell harvesting to be the destruction of human life. Because of his commitment to his evangelical base and his commitment to his definition of a leader, his range of decisions to make when H.R. 810 was significantly reduced—his decision to veto was essentially a non-decision. Commitment and social information processing worked together in this case. The fact that Bush understands the world in the same way that evangelical Christians do leads to a natural commitment to this constituency during his two terms as president. Similarly, Bush remained committed to a view of leadership

throughout the campaign because of the very nature of that definition—leaders are not flip-floppers; to change this definition would be to commit that very act. In this way, the constructs play off of one another and speak to the larger enacted environment rather than comprising distinct points of analysis. In the case of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, the enacted environment was not just constraining; it appears to have been constricting. Quite simply, on the issue of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, President Bush “was not prepared to waffle” (Allison, 2006, p. 1A).

CHAPTER V

THE SIMPLE COMPLEXITY OF SOCIAL SECURITY

One of George W. Bush's first initiatives in his second term was to promote Social Security reform. This was expected, as Social Security reform was one of the highly emphasized campaign platforms of the Bush camp, and it was the issue on which Bush planned to spend his "political capital" from the election. Despite the high probability of this course of action, the move was viewed as risky by some. Social Security, the program enacted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935 to provide a financial security net to Americans during the Great Depression, has long been considered the "third rail" of American politics: Touch it, and your political career will die. Even Ronald Reagan, who initially advocated a major overhaul of the system akin to that of privatization during the Goldwater campaign of 1964, signed into law the Social Security Amendments of 1983. This act not only kept the Social Security system intact, it also raised payroll taxes to divert even more money into the trust and began to pre-fund the system in anticipation of the retirement of over 40 million Baby Boomers—then 25 years into the future.

George W. Bush experienced no such transformation on the subject. Bush had been a public supporter of private accounts since 1978, the year he unsuccessfully ran for a House seat to represent part of West Texas. During this race Bush delivered a speech on the topic of Social Security to real estate agents at Midland Country Club. According to the *New York Times*, which drew upon a 1978 article published in the

Midland Reporter-Telegram, Bush told the audience, ““Social Security will be bust in 10 years unless there are some changes. The ideal solution would be for Social Security to be made sound and people given the chance to invest the money the way they feel”” (Stevenson, 2005, p. 1). The subject was broached in the 2000 election in very similar terms, and it would most likely have been a feature of Bush’s first term had the Bush tax cuts in 2000, the events of September 11, 2001, and the downturn in the economy during the early 2000s not transpired. The initiative instead became a highlight of the 2004 election, and to promote his policies, Bush spoke of Social Security reform and the broader concept of an “ownership society” in his inaugural address in January of 2005 and his State of the Union address the following month. Bush and high-ranking members of the administration also set off on a tour of the country to talk about the need for Social Security reform and Bush’s proposed “personal accounts” as a change to the system. From February through July they crisscrossed the nation on the “60 stops in 60 Days” tour, achieving those 60 stops within the first 30 days and far surpassing that number by May of 2005 for a total 166 stops in 127 cities (Social Security Information Center, 2005).

Despite all of these conversations, massive amounts of press attention, and almost innumerable books and popular press articles devoted to the subject of personal accounts as a major component of Social Security reform, Bush found the response to his plans to be lukewarm at best. In fact, the Website created specifically for this policy, “StrengtheningSocialSecurity.gov,” has not even been updated since November of 2005. The policy changes initiated by Bush are effectively dead in the water. The question,

then, becomes why? With all the time, human resources, and money poured into this cause, I argue that there are two interrelated reasons why Bush's plan failed. First, Bush's rhetoric emphasized the impending "crisis" facing Social Security in simplistic and unequivocal language in a way that did not acknowledge the actual equivocality that is inherent in the system. Second, the Bush administration's lack of specificity when discussing the solution caused a conflict in what Weick would term "requisite variety." In this case, the Bush administration stated the problem in clear, immediate terms. The solution of partial privatization or personal accounts, however, lacked the same level of specificity. As more and more details about the plan were released, the voting public and their representatives were left with a solution that seemed overly complex for the seemingly simple problem at hand. Bush's attempt to secure support for a solution that was filled with uncertainty left the Bush proposal unappealing at best, reckless at worst—both for the American public and the politicians who depend on that public for support.

Method

This case study seeks to delve into the world of Social Security reform and further explicate the links between Bush's plan, equivocality, and the uncertainty of personal accounts or partial privatization. To gain a richer understanding of the conflict at hand, I drew from several sources. First, I consulted books on Social Security and options to reform the system that were published between 1999 and 2007. This time period includes not only Bush's push for reform in 2005, but also his first presidential statements in support of partial privatization in the 1999-2000 campaign. Second, I

relied upon the February 2005 White House white paper entitled *Strengthening Social Security for the 21st Century*. This document discusses the administration's views on the problems facing Social Security, outlines ways to ensure permanent solvency for the program, and details Bush's reform centerpiece, the creation of personal accounts.

Third, I visited the *Strengthening Social Security* Webpage and relied upon the text of the page itself and the links provided on the site. These chronicled the text of each statement made by President Bush and other administration officials before, during, and after the "60 Stops in 60 Days" tour. The page also provided links to fact sheets, white papers, statements, and press releases made by the White House, the Council of Economic Advisers, the Department of the Treasury, the Social Security Information Center (part of the Department of the Treasury), and the Social Security Trustees.

Several "Ask the White House" sessions were useful for this project and accessed through the *Strengthening Social Security* Webpage. As described by the White House, "Ask the White House" is "an online forum where you can submit questions to Administration officials and friends of the White House" (Blahous, 2005). Of particular note are several "Ask the White House" sessions hosted by Chuck Blahous, a Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, that directly addressed questions about the future of Social Security. In total, the *Strengthening Social Security* Webpage yielded just over 150 pages of text. Additional information for this case study came from the Social Security Board of Trustees which each year issues a report on the state of Social Security and actuarial projections of the program for the next 75 years.

Reports by the Congressional Budget office and the United States Government

Accountability Office provided further summary and clarification of the Trustees' reports and the costs of the administration's plan. Finally, major newspapers and magazines were searched using LexisNexis Academic for articles between the months of January through July 2005 that contained the phrases "Social Security" and "Bush" in the headline. This search yielded 237 articles that were read for descriptions of the problem facing Social Security, Bush's proposals to change the system, and reactions to those proposals. The decision to limit the search to articles that contained "Social Security" and "Bush" in the title was made to narrow the field of relevant articles. Searches without these parameters yielded well over 4000 articles.

In analyzing these materials, I followed Weick's (2007, p. 16) suggestion and "read with theories in hand" to help increase my own complexity as I formulated and refined my arguments. As Weick (2007, p. 16) stated, "The importance of a head full of theories is that it increases requisite variety." Because it "takes richness to grasp richness" (Weick, 2007, p. 16), it was important for me to learn about the history, context, components, and possible futures of the existing Social Security system in order to see the equivocality of the program and the uncertain impacts of integrating personal accounts into the system. The pages that follow are the results of that work. I first look to Weick to explain the ideas of equivocality and requisite variety. I then use that knowledge to gain insight into Bush's 2005 plans for Social Security reform, including the rhetoric used to describe the problem and solution. Finally, I argue that in the light of the need for requisite variety, the Bush plan was doomed to fail from the start.

Weick and Requisite Variety

In Weick's theory of organizing, he draws upon Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety to frame the role of equivocality that is found in systems. Simply put, the Law states that "it takes equivocality to remove equivocality" (Weick, 1969, p. 40) with regard to the problems, environments, interpretations, and solutions that are enacted and addressed by organizations. Organizations are formed in order to make sense of the environment; they are equivocality-reducing entities. The process of organizing itself, however, must be just as complex as the environment. As Weick (1969, p. 40) stated, "processes must have the same degree of order or chaos as there is in the input to these processes." Organizations addressing complex, chaotic problems that are high in equivocality should remember that the solutions to those problems must demonstrate equal complexity. Weick (1969, p. 40) informed us,

If an orderly process is applied to a chaotic set of information inputs, then only a small portion of these inputs will be attended to and made unequivocal. The major portion of the equivocality in the input will remain outside the control of the system.

Applying a simplistic solution to a complex problem leads to an incomplete, symptomatic treatment of the problem at hand. To illustrate, this is often the case in currently incurable genetic or hereditary medical conditions such as cystic fibrosis. Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disease in which there is a problem with a particular protein that regulates the way water and salt move in and out of cells. The results are profound. Sufferers of the disease produce thick mucus that invades their lungs and their

digestive systems, causing problems with breathing and the breakdown and absorption of necessary nutrients. Because there is so much equivocality regarding the inputs of this disease—why the genetic mutation occurs, the irregularities in protein and amino acid “building blocks,” and how to use and apply gene therapy to the irregular genes—there is no comprehensive way to treat cystic fibrosis. Instead, doctors, therapists, and patients use a combination of simple therapies that address the amino acid irregularities and the buildup of mucus in the lungs. None of these treatments actually resolves the problems; instead, each orderly process manages a small part of the overall equivocal disease (Mayo Foundation, 2008). There is hope, however, that cystic fibrosis itself may one day be treated rather than simply managed. This is because doctors are now able to test parents who may be carriers of the disease—we know what DNA markers to look for. In this sense, some equivocality has been removed from the disease. Weick (2001, p. 50) stated that “no sensing device can control input that is more complicated than the sensing device.” With our ability to do genetic testing and DNA profiles of the human genome, we can now “sense” many genetic diseases. While we cannot yet control all of those inputs, we can at least measure them.

The characteristics of equivocality and requisite variety do not only relate to medical conditions or organizational problems and environments. They are also factors in choices related to media richness and language. Discussions of complex problems or processes, such as the finer points of quantum physics, require language that is varied and a rich channel that provides many cues for both the speaker and the audience. As Weick (1995, p. 196) stated, in these situations, one must “do whatever you can to

increase the variety of the language with which you work.” Discussions about where to have lunch, however, do not require complex language or rich channels (see, for example, discussions of Media Richness Theory in Daft and Lengel, 1984). The important lesson is that the complexity or simplicity of language, channels, solutions, sensing devices, and so on must match the complexity or simplicity of the phenomena, problems, environments, or inputs to which they are intended. Although specifically directed toward channel and issues of media richness, Weick’s (2001, p. 333) following words sum up this lesson: “Rich media provide multiple cues and quick feedback which are essential for complex issues but less essential for routine problems. Too much richness introduces the inefficiencies of overcomplications, too little media richness introduces the inaccuracy of oversimplification.” In the case of Social Security, as I argue below, it appears that the Bush administration erred on both accounts by oversimplifying the complexity of the Social Security system and overcomplicating the plan to increase solvency.

George W. Bush and Social Security Reform

Much was made of Social Security reform during the 2004 presidential campaign, and Bush set to work on this issue almost immediately after being re-elected to office. His inaugural address spoke of an “ownership society,” and the first area where Bush believed ownership was needed was Social Security. Arguing that the Social Security trust fund was empty and the system would soon go bankrupt, Bush put forward a plan to gradually allow workers to deposit up to four percentage points of their 6.2% payroll tax into private accounts that would be invested into a mix of stocks and

bonds. The administration argued that the return on money invested in the stock market is much greater than the return provided by an investment in Social Security. Further, workers would own their accounts, and they would be able to pass their nest egg along to their families in the case of death.

Despite claims that the rate of return on private accounts could be six, seven, or even eight percent and that all Americans could be made millionaires through the program (O'Neill, 2005), public, private and Congressional support for the plan remained low. Further, the more the each audience heard about the plan, the lower their levels of support fell. By March of 2005, companies such as Edward D. Jones began to withdraw support that they had previously pledged, as did alliances of money management and financial companies. One such alliance was Financial Services Forum, which the *Washington Post* (Birnbaum, 2005, p. E10) described as “an association of 19 chief executives of large financial services companies.” Although they had originally joined Compass, the leading pro-Bush-plan industry group, the president of Forum indicated that he did not have the support of his constituency to remain involved in Compass’ activities. Unions such as the A.F.L.-C.I.O. applauded this move and staged demonstrations in over 70 cities, including New York City, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, to persuade moderate Republicans not to back Bush’s plan. They also demonstrated at financial institutions, such as Charles Schwab, that had pledged support for the Bush proposal. They encouraged companies like Charles Schwab to join in their quest to “defend workers’ financial interests and exercise their fiduciary duties” (Greenhouse, 2005, p. A20) by battling the move to privatize Social Security.

Indicators of waning public support were similarly found by a March *Washington Post-ABC News* poll. The survey found that only 35% of Americans approved of Bush's handling of the Social Security issue, and moreover, the article reported, "58% of those polled this time said the more they hear about Bush's plan, they less they like it" (Weisman, 2005a, p. A01), a trend similarly found by a Pew Research Center poll (VandeHei & Allen, 2005b). Wisconsin Democratic Party chairwoman Linda Honold agreed and stated, "Evidently the 60-day tour didn't succeed in convincing anyone. Every time [Bush] goes in, it seems more people decide this is not a good idea" (Baker, 2005, p. A04). *The Economist* ("Candidate Bush Returns," 2005) put it more bluntly: "George Bush's campaign for Social Security reform has hardly had a stellar start. Polls suggest that public enthusiasm for private accounts has waned, and that a majority of people wonder whether Mr. Bush knows what he is doing." Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid of Nevada simply stated, "His solution is worse than the problem" (Keen, p. 5A). Although support for Bush's plan was high (68% approval) among adults 18 to 29 years old (Weisman, 2005a) and among households who earn \$75,000 or more per year (50% approval) (Weisman, 2005b), these coalitions were difficult to mobilize. Individuals in these groups agreed that there is a problem with Social Security and that Bush's plan was an appropriate step to take for the future of the program, but these beliefs did not lead to action.

Many Republican leaders were not on board with the program, either. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Thomma, 2005, p. A01) noted early in March, "Despite urging from party leaders, only about one-third of House Republicans held town-hall meetings

with constituents last week to sell Bush's approach. In some states, including Michigan and Minnesota, not a single Republican met with constituents to talk about Social Security." The political situation had not improved by April when it was observed that Bush's "central idea of letting workers invest some of their payroll taxes into private retirement savings accounts remains the political ball-and-chain that is hobbling his top second-term legislative goal. Virtually all Democrats in Congress, and many Republicans, are dead-set against it" (Kuhnhehn, 2005, p. A02). This was particularly true of moderate Republicans who were relatively silent on the issue. At a time when the Bush administration specifically asked them to vocalize their support for Social Security reform, the chorus was noticeably absent.

To help understand why Bush's plan failed so miserably, I first examine the administration's rhetorical construction of the problem with and the solution for Social Security. Based on issues of clarity, requisite variety, and equifinality, I argue that one reason the plan may have failed was due to a mismatch of requisite variety between problem and solution.

The "Crisis" Facing Social Security

The future of the Social Security program was universally framed in negative terms by the Bush administration. As Bush stated in his 2005 State of the Union address, the system "on its current path, is headed toward bankruptcy." In a White House document entitled *Strengthening Social Security for the 21st Century* (2005, p. 1), the administration took an even stronger tone and stated: "Social Security is making empty promises to our children and grandchildren." The document continued to state

that Social Security “cannot afford to pay promised benefits to future generations because it was designed for a 1935 world in which benefits were much lower, life-spans were shorter, there were more workers per retiree, and fewer retirees were drawing from the system.”

These themes were expounded upon in speeches made by the president and other members of the administration in the months following the State of the Union. One of the administration’s favorite statistics was stated in a Social Security speech the president delivered in Great Falls, Montana, to an invitation-only audience. He told the audience,

When Social Security was designed, there were 16 workers for every beneficiary in 1950—actually, designed in the ‘30s—in 1950, there were 16 workers for every beneficiary. That meant it was a lot easier to afford that which the government promised. When you’ve got 16 people paying in for one person, it—you can see why the system was solvent. (Bush, 2005b)

He told a Fargo, North Dakota, audience that the low ratio of workers to beneficiaries was problematic because

Today, there are about 3.3 workers [per beneficiary]. When the college kids get older, there’s going to be two workers. The benefit structure has gone up over time. And so you’ve got fewer workers paying for more retirees who are living longer, greater benefits. And if you start kind of thinking about the math there, you begin in realize, we’ve got a problem. (Bush, 2005c)

To visually illustrate this problem, the White House produced a graphic which represented a Social Security card with the differences in the numbers of workers per beneficiary depicted through human form (see Figure 2).

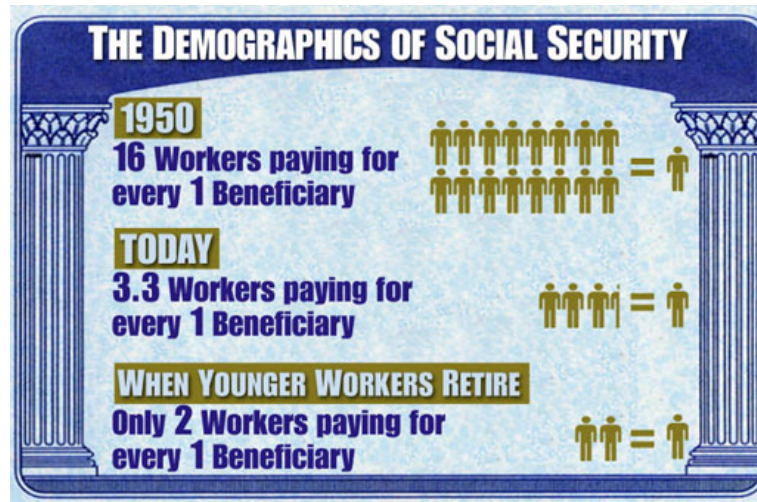


Figure 2. Number of workers per beneficiary in 1950, 2005, and in the future
(*Strengthening Social Security*, 2005).

As the figure shows, there were more workers paying into the system per beneficiary in the past than there will be in the future. Although many scholars have criticized the use of this particular statistic (as I discuss further in Chapter VI), on face value the numbers do demonstrate the trend pointed out by the administration.

The second part of the problem portrayed by the Bush administration was one of longevity. As Bush (2005b) told the audience in Montana, “What’s happened since the design of the system, however, is that people are living longer—thankfully. That’s good news.” He further explained to an audience in Nebraska,

And here's the problem. When the Social Security system was designed, the average life expectancy was about 60 years old and benefits were at a certain level, and the number of payers into the system were significantly greater than they are today.... Secondly, what has changed since then is that we're living longer. The life expectancy is now 77 years old. And as a result of living longer, you've got people who have been made promises by the government receiving checks for a longer period of time than was initially envisioned under Social Security. (Bush, 2005d)

To give this demographic trend a face, Bush invited his mother, Barbara, then 80, to join him in a conversation on both Social Security and Medicare. They talked about the programs and had several panelists on stage to help explain their concerns about the future. One of these panelists was Frances Heverly, a 91-year-old woman who told the audience that she and her friends were dependent upon Social Security checks in order to make ends meet. When asked by Bush if she was receiving a check, she responded, "I sure am, and I appreciate it" (Bush, 2005h). One of Bush's intentions with this exchange was certainly to reassure today's seniors that there was plenty of money left in the fund for them to continue to receive their Social Security benefits. Mrs. Heverly, however, also served as an example of why reform was needed; if even one quarter of the Baby Boomers reached the age of Mrs. Heverly, the strain on social services would be enormous.

With fewer workers paying for the benefits of Americans who live longer than they did in the past, the conclusion reached by the administration was that the Social

Security trust fund would go bankrupt. Bush (2005a) argued in his 2005 State of the Union address:

So here is the result: Thirteen years from now, in 2018, Social Security will be paying out more than it takes in. And every year afterward will bring a new shortfall, bigger than the year before. For example, in the year 2027, the government will somehow have to come up with an extra \$200 billion to keep the system afloat—and by 2033, the annual shortfall would be more than \$300 billion. By the year 2042, the entire system would be exhausted and bankrupt. If steps are not taken to avert that outcome, the only solution would be dramatically higher taxes, massive new borrowing, or sudden and severe cuts in Social Security benefits or other programs.

He summarized for the audience in North Dakota that because of longevity and low numbers of workers, “the system goes into the red. And it goes into the red—that means negative, that means losing money—quite dramatically” (Bush, 2005c).

The system does indeed go into the red in 2018 on a second chart produced by the White House (see Figure 3). Some have argued that this is an unfair depiction because it does not take into account the huge Social Security trust fund that is available to pay benefits between the initial year of outgo exceeding income and the year the fund runs out of money. Similarly, the argument does not acknowledge the fact that despite the zero balance in the trust fund, there will still be payroll taxes collected each

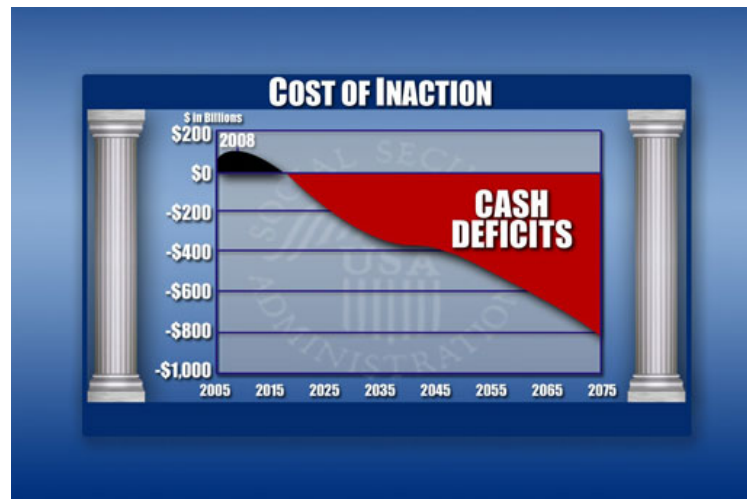


Figure 3. The White House projects that in 2018 Social Security will begin to pay more in benefits than it collects in payroll taxes. The cash deficits of the program are shown from 2005 through 2079, the 75-year window that the Trustees evaluate in their yearly Social Security report (*Strengthening Social Security*, 2005).

year to pay a large majority of promised benefits. But there is no disagreement about the fact that at some point in the near future Social Security will pay out more than it takes in; this is known with certainty. The question is what this deficit really means. Will it signal the financial demise of the program? Or will there be a way to change the existing system to compensate for this difference in income and payments? The administration fell on the side of financial demise, and, as Bush told Montana supporters, “And the longer you wait, the harder it is to fix the problem” (Bush, 2005b). Not only must action be taken; according to Bush, it must be taken immediately.

“Personal Accounts” Are the Solution

As an important step toward an ownership society, Bush recommended that workers who currently pay 6.2% of their pay to Social Security be given the option to voluntarily divert a portion of that money into personal or private accounts. The funds in these accounts would be invested in a mix of conservative stocks and bonds similar to the federal government’s Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Workers could choose from a small variety of investment packages, and, according to Bush, the accounts would be managed by the federal government rather than an investment company or companies. Initially workers would be able to divert up to \$1,000 per year into the accounts, but eventually Bush advocated the ability to reserve 4% of payroll for these accounts. The additional 2.2% of earnings that would normally be paid in payroll taxes would go to financing traditional Social Security (*Strengthening*, 2005).

Bush further stated that these personal accounts could not be borrowed against or withdrawn until one reached retirement age. At that time, workers could not “cash out” the account. Instead, he stated that the funds would be paid out over the rest of the worker’s life and that these funds could be willed in the case of a balance left in the account at the time of death. Finally, the Bush plan would offer workers protection against “sudden market swings on the eve of retirement” (*Strengthening*, 2005, p. 7) by transitioning personal accounts into a “life cycle portfolio” upon reaching the age of 47. In a life cycle portfolio, funds are shifted from higher-risk stocks and placed into more secure bonds. Workers would have the option to not move to a life cycle portfolio, but

life cycle portfolios would be the default action taken by the government unless specifically instructed not to do so by the owner of the account.

The personal or private account option may sound reasonable and attractive upon first reading, but like so many ideas, the devil is in the details—and this is particularly problematic in this case as the details are noticeably absent. Further those details that were revealed inevitably lead to questions about additional costs and complexities that do not exist in the current system, and I argue that this is the heart of the requisite variety conflict. Not only is Bush's solution filled with unknowns, even the knowns are mired in unknowns. As the Employee Benefit Research Institute (2001, p. 2) stated, "Adding individual accounts to Social Security could be the largest undertaking in the history of the U.S. financial market, and no system currently exists that has the capacity to administer such a system." The government, then, would be left to create an entirely new system for regulating and administering retirement pensions that would have to work in tandem with the existing Social Security system.

A good example of this high level of uncertainty is the White House's claim that the personal accounts would be inheritable. There is no existing low-cost system that allows both lifetime payments and the ability to pass the balance to heirs. In order for payouts to be made over the course of a lifetime, one would have to purchase an annuity at considerable cost—on average 1.25% of the principal, equal to a 15 to 20% reduction in benefits if there were no administrative costs, although women are generally charged more because they have longer life expectancies than do men (Congressional Budget Office, 2004) —and annuities are generally not inheritable. There are some annuities

that include minimum death benefit payouts, but these often charge a higher rate to purchase the annuity. Despite this, however, the White House stated that “procedures would be established to govern how account balances would be withdrawn at retirement” (*Strengthening*, 2005, p. 7) and passed on to heirs. According to the Bush plan, “This would involve some combination of annuities to ensure a stream of monthly income over the worker’s life expectancy, phased withdrawals indexed to life expectancy, and lump sum withdrawals” (*Strengthening*, 2005, pp.7-8). The exact combination of the administration procedures governing those combinations, however, was left a mystery.

A second area of the Bush plan that demonstrates a high level of uncertainty (especially for workers who are not familiar with investment-style retirement packages) occurs in the discussion of cost—both transitional and administrative. Whenever a new system is instituted, there are costs associated with that move that finance employees, space, equipment, etc. The costs associated with a pension system specifically include collection and processing, asset management, calculation and payment of benefits, enforcement and oversight, and marketing and sales (Congressional Budget Office, 2004). Projections of the costs of a move to a partially privatized system of Social Security vary from hundreds of billion to trillions of dollars over the next generation. The costs of the proposal and their impact on the system and society as described by the Bush administration are framed in language that is extremely unclear. The *Strengthening Social Security for the 21st Century* (2005, p. 8) stated the following:

The President's personal retirement account proposal is fiscally responsible. . . .

Based on analysis by the Social Security Administration Actuary, the Office of Management and Budget estimates that the President's personal retirement account proposal will require transition financing of \$664 billion over the next ten years (\$754 billion including interest). This transition financing will not have the same effect on national savings, and thus the economy, as traditional government borrowing. Personal retirement accounts will not reduce the pool of savings available to the markets because every dollar borrowed by the Federal government to fund the transition is fully offset by an increase in savings represented by the accounts themselves.

Based on this description, it almost appears that despite the fact that \$664 billion will be required for the new system, it somehow will not cost anything. The administration argued that the increase in national savings will offset the costs of the system, but this does not address the costs to the existing system. If large numbers of workers are shifting their payroll taxes out of Social Security, there will certainly be costs to the system. As *Business Week* (Bernstein, Gleckman, & Mandel, 2005) reported, "To set up private accounts, Washington would have to sell up to \$2 trillion worth of bonds to cover payments to current retirees." That is \$2 trillion less in the trust fund available to collect interest and to be used for benefits payments. Moreover, the offsetting funds cannot be appreciated until one begins to collect payments from personal accounts—likely to be 40 or more years in the future. This unclear language paints a complex and

difficult to understand picture that is in stark contrast to the clarity with which the problem is described.

The same mismatch in language is true of the costs to manage a partially privatized system. The administration stated,

Personal retirement accounts would not be eaten up by hidden Wall Street fees.

Personal retirement accounts would be low-cost. The Social Security

Administration's actuaries project that the ongoing administrative costs for a

TSP-style personal account structure would be roughly 30 basis points or 0.3

percentage points, compared to an average of 125 basis points for investments in

stock mutual funds and 88 basis points in bond mutual funds in 2003.

Even if one does not understand what basis points are, it appears that paying 30 basis points is better than paying 125 basis points or even 88 basis points. The difficulty in interpreting these numbers is that there is no point of comparison included in the statements regarding administrative costs. For example, existing TSP plans only cost 3 basis points to regulate ("Question and Answers", n.d.) or about \$25 per participant per year (Congressional Budget Office, 2004); a nation-wide program would apparently cost ten times more. The Congressional Budget Office further calculated that the existing Social Security pension system costs only \$11 per participant per year to manage—less than half of the existing TSP program. As economists and historians Santow and Santow (2005, p. 19) concluded, "Social Security is very efficient: Administrative costs are 1 percent of benefits, versus 12 to 14 percent for private insurance." The federal

government is good at writing checks; the existing system of Social Security requires less oversight and regulation than a more complex system of investment.

Further, authors, scholars, and journalists have all pointed to the complexity and uncertainty of a system of partial privatization itself beyond cost. As Baker and Weisbrot (1999, p. 89) noted, the answers to questions about transitioning and regulating privatized Social Security

are not simple, but two things are plain: privatizing will have to involve the creation of a massive regulatory structure that would oversee large portions of the nation's financial system, and the government will end up monitoring the personal savings and spending behavior of virtually every worker and retiree in the nation.

Journalist Michael Hiltzik (2005, p. 4) similarly noted that personal accounts “would require such complicated administrative oversight that the Social Security Administration, perhaps the most efficient arm of the federal government, would have to hire as many as 100,000 new employees.” He further pointed out that this estimate comes from Fidelity Investments, a company that favors private accounts. In general, the criticisms of the case for private accounts revolve around two points—the uncertainty related to the details of Bush's plan and the uncertainty associated with investing pensions in the stock market.

Many politicians and citizens have expressed concern over the amount of equivocality in Bush's language when he discussed the plan to create private accounts in addition to traditional Social Security—there were many ways to interpret the effects of

privatization, and Bush did not appear to be sensitive to this equivocality. Republican Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine stated on CNN that “discussion over the president’s ideas has produced ‘confusion and fear among seniors,’ who don’t want their benefits cut” (quoted in Fagan, 2005, p. A04). An article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* claimed that Bush was “still evading a crucial question” (Brown, 2005, p. E01) and stated the following:

If workers are allowed—or required—to put part of their payroll contributions into personal investment accounts holding stocks and bonds, how much will their traditional, guaranteed benefits have to be cut? By 25 percent? By 50 percent?... Without knowing how big the cuts would be, it’s impossible to judge whether ordinary workers would have any reasonable chance of offsetting them with investment gains in their personal accounts, as the President says they would. Clearly, by ducking this issue, the President hopes to give the personal-account scheme enough momentum to carry it through Congress once the grim details are known.

This lack of specificity hurt the chances of success for the Bush plan, as the *St. Petersburg Times* observed. The paper said, “In large measure, President Bush owes his unbroken string of major political and policy victories to his gift for defining key issues simply, then staying ahead of the debate and never letting his opponents cloud his message” (Allison & Kumar, 2005, p. 1A). On Social Security, however, Bush failed to execute this proven course of action. The *St. Petersburg Times* continued,

Since winning re-election in November, the president has spoken often about his desire to revamp Social Security. Yet his unwillingness to provide key details about how it would work and who might win or lose has created a vacuum that his critics have happily filled, challenging Bush's claim that the system is crashing and sowing worry about his call for personal investment accounts.

(Allison & Kumar, 2005, p. 1A)

Senator John Kerry agreed and simply stated, “There is no plan from the president” (Rosenbaum, Toner, & Stevenson, 2005, p. 20). This may be somewhat hyperbolic, but the argument was given some historical context by the *Washington Post*. They drew comparisons between the Bush plan and Roosevelt's proposal to establish Social Security and stated, “Roosevelt presented Congress with a highly detailed proposal developed by a Cabinet-level committee, and it passed Congress relatively intact. Bush, by contrast, has left it to Congress to work out the details, providing it with only broad details” (Milbank, 2005, p. A13).

The lack of detail and high amount of equivocality is problematic because it gives those against the plan the opportunity to fill in those blanks with their interpretations of private accounts. If opponents do not provide a richer picture, the public is left with questions that do not have an answer. While this is of concern to everyone, the working poor have a particularly high stake in knowing the future of Social Security. The program often makes up the vast majority—if not all—of their retirement income. Gregory Ligon, 56, a medical supply warehouse worker at Walter Reed Medical Center argued that Bush had not attempted to sell his proposal to the

working poor, instead speaking only to groups of invited supporters. Even in those speeches, however, Ligon observed that “‘he’s not telling you everything. There’s a lot left out that you don’t know about, so someone else down the line has to come in and say, ‘You know, what he meant was...’” (quoted in Weisman, 2005b, p. A01). Those left to pick up the President’s slack certainly felt that pressure. House of Representatives member Ginny Brown-Waite, for example, believed that “the president’s lack of specifics has made it hard to answer her constituents’ questions” (Allison & Kumar, 2005, p. 1A). Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin spoke to constituents, and as he made the case for private accounts to four people in Sharon, Wisconsin, population 1,591, one of the people, Bethal Holmes Long, 90, blurted,

“So what?” Long said she worries about promises of substantial returns, when Social Security now seems sure. “Words are rosy, but really what will it turn into?” she asked. “Times change. Everything changes. You don’t know what might happen in five years or 10 years.” (Allen, 2005b, p. A01)

Long addressed the idea that the Bush plan had a lot of style without substance, but she also invoked a second layer of uncertainty in the Bush plan in the concerns she voiced to Ryan—that of investing pensions in the stock market.

Investing in the stock market has a high level of inherent uncertainty because we cannot predict the future. Even those who spend their lives working with financial markets cannot predict the economic conditions of the future with complete certainty. Because of this ambiguity, support for Bush’s proposal was not easy to find. As Nancy

Altman (2006, p.. 285, 288), former Alan Greenspan assistant and current Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Pension Rights Center, noted

...the problems with the proposal went far beyond the language. The administration had offered some general descriptions of the private accounts proposal but few details.... But no one was looking at the details. The widespread opposition to the president's proposal was more fundamental and profound. Most people simply did not want to trade the guarantee of Social Security's promised benefits for the risk to the individual from investing in the stock market.

Former Social Security Commissioner Robert M. Ball agreed that the uncertainty of the stock market was too great for individuals to bear in regard to retirement pensions. He stated, "It is one thing to have retirement income *supplementary* to Social Security, such as IRAs and 401(k) plans, tied to investments, but quite another thing to have one's basic retirement income dependent on the uncertainties of individual private investment" (Ball et al., 1996). Economists Henry Aaron and Robert Reischauer agreed. They examined several proposals for Social Security reform and came to the following conclusion:

On balance, we conclude that the case for retaining the Social Security system—with certain significant modifications—is stronger. Fundamental to this position is the recognition that Social Security provides greater pension security than could mandatory saving in personal retirement accounts. If the underlying purpose of mandatory saving schemes is to assure retirees, the disabled, and

survivors adequate basic incomes, then uncertainty about what that income will be defeats the central objective. (Aaron & Reischauer, 2001, p. 11)

Not only may private accounts defeat the purpose of a financial safety net, but they may do so in disproportionate ways. As Hiltzik (2005, p. 146) noted, “Private accounts would shift all the risk inherent in economic and market cycles onto the shoulders of people least able to bear it.” The system of private accounts is based on uncertainty and the ties between risk and reward. The problem, as many scholars see it, is that most people cannot afford the risk associated with uncertainty in retirement pensions. This risk is most costly for those who need secure retirement pensions the most—the working poor. Regardless of the cost of managing the system, the cost associated with market risk may be too much to bear.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the available evidence, I argue that Bush’s plan to include private accounts into a package of Social Security reform failed the test of requisite variety on two accounts. First, the language of the problem was not rich and led to an oversimplification of the problem. Although the graphs demonstrating demographic trends and the costs of inaction are memorable and easy to understand, they attempted to make concrete that which has yet to be determined. The dates, statistics, and costs associated with the current Social Security system are based on the Social Security Board of Trustees’ annual reports which predict the state of the system 75 years into the future—a process that is filled with uncertainty and the actuaries treat as equivocal. As Santow and Santow (2005, p. 88) argued,

Politicians and other observers tend to talk as if the trustees' seventy-five year projections were precise. Social Security's own actuaries don't claim such certainty, of course. For this reason, they make three different projections of economic and demographic data. They have also changed them frequently, and their accuracy leaves something to be desired. In 1994 the system was supposed to go bust in 2029, according to the Social Security trustees. Back on May 15, 2000, when soon-to-be-president George W. Bush made a major speech on partial privatization, he used an exhaustion date of 2037. In the trustees' annual report published in March 2004, the so-called exhaustion date for the trust account was 2042, and now a Congressional Budget Office study indicates that 2052 is the best estimate for the exhaustion date. The "doomsday date" continues to be shifted frequently and always farther into the future. It gets shifted because the data and facts require it to be shifted that way. Moreover, there is more shifting into the future to come.

Because of the innumerable factors that must be considered to make predictions about the state of Social Security so far into the future, we simply do not know what 2029, 2037, or 2042 will look like until we get there. To talk about it with such certainty ignores the richness that is required by requisite variety. This may have led the administration to search for solutions to an incorrectly perceived problem and diminished the hope that their plan would be accepted by the public.

The second failure of the Bush proposal may be related to the fact that there is a mismatch between the rhetoric of the problem and the rhetoric of the solution. As

demonstrated above, the language of the crisis facing Social Security is clear, direct, and simple: The program is running out of money, and it will go broke unless we do something now. That “something,” however, cannot be described so easily.

If Bush wanted to solve the simple and direct problems discussed so often with audiences across the country, there were many simple solutions at his disposal. The Government Accountability outlined 23 steps contained in 14 existing plans that could be taken to change Social Security and evaluated each step in terms of sustainable solvency, balancing adequacy and equity, implementation and administration, and additional considerations (Walker, 2005). To address the solvency issue which made up almost the entirety of the administration’s frame for the problems facing Social Security, one simple solution would be to change the formula for benefits. Benefits are currently indexed to wages, but they could be indexed to inflation or longevity, they could be indexed at different rates for high-income versus low-income beneficiaries, or the benefits could be means-tested in a manner similar to the United Kingdom’s social insurance program (see Munnell & Sass, 2006, for more information on means-tested benefits programs). These proposals would effectively shrink the size of the “outputs” to compensate for the increase in beneficiaries. A second option that would have great impact on the program’s solvency would be to raise payroll taxes by percentage or through the cap placed on taxable wages. Third, the government could investigate other sources of revenue for the trust fund. This would again increase the inputs to the system and increase the size of trust available to make benefits payments. Any of these steps

would clearly put money into the Social Security trust fund and offset the straightforward problems described by the Bush administration.

Bush, however, advocated a system of individual accounts which, according to the Government Accountability Office's study, "would not achieve solvency unless coupled with other changes" (Walker, 2005, p. 13). If Bush wanted to gain acceptance of his complex, multi-phased plan, he would have reframed the problem to speak more to the complex nature of the problem—he would actually have to say "we do not know what the future will hold." This statement is necessary on a second front because not only do we not know the future of the Social Security trust fund, we do not know the future of the stock market. We simply do not know how the market will behave. The market is a relatively new invention in the U.S., and it is therefore largely untested—especially as a major method of generating retirement revenue for a wide range of individuals.

Based on the notion of requisite variety, it does not make sense to accept this complex and ineffective solution to what is framed as a simple and dire problem. There are few options on the table, however, because the administration has failed to acknowledge the equivocality present in the system. By artificially reducing the equivocality of the problems facing Social Security, it appeared appropriate to use many assembly rules to guide the solution formation process. As Weick (2001, p. 252) explained, assembly rules "are the procedures or guides that organizations use to process data into a collective interpretation." When faced with equivocality, we look for

standards with which to judge methods to make sense of that equivocality. Weick (2001, p. 252) stated,

Generally, the greater the equivocality in the data, the fewer the number of rules used to arrive at an interpretation. Conversely, the smaller the perceived equivocality of data entering the organization, the greater the number of rules used to assemble the interpretation.

When faced with high levels of equivocality, we call upon fewer existing rules, regulations, and procedures because we are unsure of what the equivocality means. Those rules that are invoked must be general rather than specific in order to guide our interpretation appropriately. Weick (2001, p. 252) stated that “if the input is less equivocal, there is more certainty as to what the item is and how it should be handled. Hence a greater number of rules can be assigned to handle the data and assemble an interpretation.”

In the case of Social Security, equivocality was not acknowledged in actuarial projections for the future or for the program in general. In 2001 Bush created the President’s Committee to Strengthen Social Security, a 16-member panel to study the Social Security program and make recommendations to ensure its solvency for the future. According to the Committee’s Web page,

The Commission was asked to make recommendations to modernize and restore fiscal soundness to Social Security, using six guiding principles: Modernization must not change Social Security benefits for retirees or near-retirees. The entire Social Security surplus must be dedicated only to Social Security. Social

Security payroll taxes must not be increased. The government must not invest Social Security funds in the stock market. Modernization must preserve Social Security's disability and survivors insurance programs. Modernization must include individually controlled, voluntary personal retirement accounts, which will augment Social Security.

This large number of assembly rules—including the provision that recommendations were required to include private accounts—likely made generating a solution that fit the problem extremely difficult. These “guiding principles” also eliminated all possible solutions to the issue of solvency entirely—the straightforward “input-output” problem described at length by the administration. Without increasing taxes or looking for new revenues, there can be no new money entering the system. Without the requirement of “preserving” all programs, there can be no reduction in money leaving the system. The equivocality of Social Security reform was artificially reduced, and the range of solutions to consider was similarly reduced in an artificial and arbitrary manner. This further speaks to Weick's notion of retrospective sensemaking—the administration had already decided to promote private accounts, and this chosen outcome influenced the entire decision-making process. The Bush administration seemingly started with their solution to Social Security reform and determined the problems to discuss post hoc without concern for how the problem and solution worked together. In order to generate a proposal that is more sensitive to the environment at hand, Bush et al. should remember Weick's (2007, p. 17) words: “Simple accounts mean you're not paying attention.” With greater attention to the equivocality of the system and richness of

language, the case may be made for privatization. Until that time, however, it appears that private accounts are the latest victim of the third rail of American politics.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This project has demonstrated the ways in which organizational theories reveal important insights into presidential administrations—their structure, their decisions, and their rhetoric. The next step is to situate these findings within Crable’s broader theory of organizational rhetoric. Weick (2007, p. 16) argued that “rich comparisons breed further richness,” and that is what I hope to accomplish. Analyses predicated on Weick and Crable’s theories provide a synergistic and holistic look into communicating and organizing within a presidential administration which, as noted by political scientists, has been notably absent from scholarship in the field.

Crable (1990) outlined several features that he believed to be the relevant elements of organizational rhetoric. First, he claimed that in order to properly model organizational rhetoric, one must take into consideration the role of production or financing organizations in the organization’s rhetoric—in other words, who produced the rhetoric and who paid for the rhetoric? This becomes complicated in politics because it is difficult to demonstrate a direct link between money and outcomes. Financing organizations donate to campaigns and administrations because direct payment for political outcome is illegal—congressional members involved in the Jack Abramoff scandal were reminded of this lesson the hard way.

Next, Crable’s model also includes the circumstances of rhetoric as perceived by both the organization and the audiences, the corporate ethos or organizational self-

concept, and audiences. Crable argued that the goal of organizational rhetoric is to secure support for an image, an opinion, or a decision, and that the production of this rhetoric involves stage managers, script writers, and a set that becomes the context for the message. Organizational rhetoric is delivered and mediated through media delivery systems, gatekeepers, and spokespersons or representatives who make appearances to gain support. Finally, Crable stated that perceptions and feedback from audiences are important elements of concern for organizational rhetoric and organizational rhetors.

To demonstrate how these elements function in political rhetoric, I revisit the findings of each of the three case studies undertaken in this project. The analysis of the Bush administration as a tightly coupled system, the administration's policy regarding federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, and the administration's push for Social Security reform each bring different elements of Crable's model to the forefront. This analysis is important because, as Crable (1990, p. 122) argued, "To ignore elements of the model is to fail in assessing completely what can be called organizational rhetoric; to fail to see what is being 'represented.'" The emphasis on representation leads to a further consideration in this discussion—the role of "sleight of hand" in presidential rhetoric. As Crable (1990, p. 123) emphasized, "The magic is not that we see things 'appear' and 'disappear;' the magic is that we fail to see what is really occurring." Organizational rhetoric can be an attempt on the part of the organization to distract the public with the right hand while doing publicly unpopular acts with the left. Many critics have leveled this claim against the Bush administration and have attempted to

show what is really occurring. This concept rhetorical magic, then, is also an important factor for the discussion below.

Cable and Tightly Coupled Systems

Based on a review of the popular and journalistic media, statements made by members of the Bush administration, and books by journalists and researchers, I argued in Chapter III that the Bush administration is a tightly coupled system. There are few voices that are permitted to speak in the inner circle, and there are perhaps even fewer honest depictions of organizational decision-making leaving that circle. The tightly coupled, insular nature of the administration leads to a second argument: Not only is the Bush administration tightly coupled, but the organization is also masterful at rhetorical sleight of hand. These two processes are certainly related—it would be more difficult to have a private, “administration-only” image if one had many connections to the world outside the Oval Office—and they similarly reinforce one another. The more one participates in rhetorical sleight of hand, the more control is required to maintain the public image under consideration.

Cable described the important role of representation in organizational rhetoric, but this notion has not been influential in political studies. Interest in this concept may develop, however, based on what Samwick (2004, p. 5) called the “politics of distraction”—something at which the Bush administration appears to be particularly adept. During the 2004 election cycle, Samwick (2004, p. 5), a Dartmouth professor and chief economist of Bush’s Council of Economic Advisers through 2003 and 2004, noted that the media preferred “sensational stories on peripheral issues” to substantive

discussions on fundamental policy issues. He argued, “This is the politics of distraction, and by shifting the public’s attention from the essential to the superficial, it does the nation a great disservice” (Samwick, 2004, p. 5). Following this line of thinking, Weiskel (2005, p. 394) further claimed that

...in an age of escalating global resource war and in the face of an omnipresent corporate entertainment industry, we are now witnessing a subtle, intentional, and seemingly permanent transition to the politics of distraction. Celebrities become politicians and politicians aspire to become celebrities as voters are relegated to the role of fans. All the while, power is ever more concentrated in the hands of a few who stage-manage pseudoevents from behind the scenes.... [N]ational politics have become a sideshow where clowns and buffoons strut and bellow across a movable stage to divert the public’s attention from what is really shaping their lives and determining the future fate of the planet.

Every part of this observation, from the stage managers to diverted attention, speaks directly to Crable’s model of organizational rhetoric.

Weiskel discussed the billions of dollars that finance campaigns and pay public relations experts to promote a particular image and message of a candidate, as well as the lawyers who are hired to disguise the sources of this money. Chomsky (2006, p. 226) noted the public relations phenomenon in politics and stated, “As in the markets constructed by the PR industry, so also in the democratic elections they run, a primary task is to delude the public by carefully constructed images that have only the vaguest resemblance to reality.” The overarching critique, then, is not that presidents have to

portray a presidential image. The critique comes when the image is in some way disingenuous, and the Bush administration has gained a reputation for careful navigation of the line between image management and dishonesty. Fritz, Keefer, and Nyhan (2004, p. 5) stated:

Unlike famous White House dissemblers of the past, Bush almost never explicitly claims that black is white or day is night. Instead, he deceives the public with partial truths and misleading assertions.... Because Bush's statements are so often constructed in this way, he has walked away from one deceptive claim after another scot-free.... At this point, the difference between corporate marketing and White House communications has largely disappeared.

Just as Crable predicted, presidential/organizational rhetoric is concerned with financing organizations, script writers, stage managers, securing support, organizational image, sets, and representation as magic.

Weiskel further noted the appeal of actors as politicians; he did not mention Kenneth Burke in this discussion, but the observation that actors are increasingly popular political "spokespersons" (in Crable's use of the term) certainly speaks to the idea of an actor/agency switch. If a presidential actor is an agency rather than an agent, it follows that those who are trained to be actors in the Hollywood sense (e.g. Jesse Ventura and Arnold Schwarzenegger) would have a natural fit in the politics of distraction and the fourth system of rhetoric.

Although his arguments are at times couched in radical language, the heart of Weiskel's argument is essentially what Crable predicted a decade and a half earlier. The

fact that Crable is cited by neither Samwick nor Weiskel indicates that there is a need for a more systematic analysis of the model of organizational rhetoric—a goal toward which this project is dedicated. In particular, tightly coupled systems may be critical to the rhetorical representation described by Crable, and this is certainly the case with the Bush administration.

Critics have leveled complaints of secrecy, dishonesty, trickery and distraction against the Bush administration virtually since the day it began. A quick browse of books written about the administration reveals such titles as *Crimes Against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals are Plundering Our Country and Hijacking Our Democracy* (Kennedy, 2004), *The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception* (Corn, 2003), *Veering Right: How the Bush Administration Subverts the Law for Conservative Causes* (Tiefer, 2004), and, of course, fellow adopted-Texan Molly Ivins' (2003) coauthored *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America*. These books all in some way posit a disconnect between the Bush administration and reality or an attempt by the administration to hide its true activities. Further, these claims cover a wide variety of issues. As Alterman and Green (2004, p. 5) claimed, in the areas of environmental, economic, education, science, and foreign policy, the “Bush modus operandi has been to say one thing and to do another.” In the remainder of this section, I point to two specific areas where critics have leveled claims of this type of rhetorical sleight of hand.

First, Weiskel considered environmental policy in the Bush administration and argued that Bush would frequently advocate for “sound science” on the matter of global

warming. As a result, Weiskel (2005, p. 399) argued, Bush could “appear to be doing something meaningful by calling for further ‘research,’ all the while sidestepping any meaningful action to curb fossil fuel consumption.” Despite the decades of work conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United States is one of the last global warming hold-outs, claiming that further scientific research is needed to make the case for human influence on climate change. The Clinton administration was party to the Kyoto Accords, meetings to create a global climate policy, but failed to deliver the Kyoto Protocol to Congress. The Bush administration further removed the U.S. from the rest of the world on this issue by not attending climate change panels and completely removing the U.S. from the Accords. The administration claims to want and need sound science in order to accept the impact humans have on the environment, but they (and subsequently “we”) do not attend the very meetings where this research is discussed, a clear indication that the administration is more concerned with appearances to the domestic public than with action.

Second, Chomsky (2006) claimed that the push for Social Security reform—replete with sleight of hand of its own—is in itself a distraction from a larger and more pressing issue—the rising costs of health care. He stated that “to the extent that Social Security might face a crisis some time in the distant future, it would result primarily from exploding health care costs” (Chomsky, 2006, p. 249). Ironically, the cost of Medicare is expected to increase by huge amounts in the future as a result of the program’s increasing levels of privatization, a fact also noted by Baker and Weisbrot

(1999). On the topic of Social Security as a diversionary tactic from the cost of health care, Chomsky (2006, p. 247, quoting Krugman) argued that

the steady drumbeat of deceit has been so extreme as to drive frustrated analysts to words rarely voiced in restrained journals: that Bush “repeatedly lied about the current [Social Security] system,” making claims that “were demonstrably false and that his staff must have known were false.”

Chomsky (2006, p. 58) concluded that on many issues, the administration had resorted to the “familiar ‘Thief, thief!’ technique: when you are caught with your hands in someone’s pocket, shout ‘Thief, thief!’ and point vigorously somewhere else, in the hopes that attention will be shifted while you flee.” While this may speak poorly of the current state of politics, we should not be surprised that this is a common technique. As Crable (1990, p. 123) noted, “The magical sleight of hand representation of the modern organization is not speculation; it is as close as one comes to a fact of life.” It is left to the public, then, to try to determine what is “real” and what is “merely a shadow of what is really there” (Crable, 1990, p. 124).

The juxtaposition of Crable and Weick reveals that in an organizational system of rhetoric, tightly coupled systems may be the norm because of the control that they allow. Presidential administrations, although large, cannot be open, unwieldy systems. They must instead be made up of members who repress their own identities and ideas in favor of the organizational identity and ideas that are promoted by the administration (Colin Powell) or members who fully embrace and accept the organizational identity and ideas as their own (Condoleezza Rice). The question that scholars must answer in the

future is whose identity and ideas are actually being represented? And where does diversion end and reality begin? The answers to these questions, although undoubtedly difficult to find, will help us resist the politics of distraction and see through the sleight of hand of the rhetor-magician.

Crable and the Enacted Environment

Bush's decision on whether or not to provide federal funding for embryonic stem cell research was constrained by two enacted environments. First, Bush's identity as an evangelical Christian shaped his views of what constitutes life and when life begins. Second, the introduction of the term "flip-flopping" in the 2004 campaign made it difficult—if not impossible—for Bush to move away from his earlier policy stance on the topic. While these arguments are valuable for organizational theory, they can further be extended to speak to Crable's theory of organizational rhetoric. Bush's stance on stem cell research is part of what Crable would describe as an organizational "self-concept." This element of the model of organizational rhetoric includes the "judgments, values, fear, needs, desires, [and] images of/by the organization" (Crable, 1990, p. 121). The rhetoric of the Bush administration on many issues—including federal funding for embryonic stem cell research—contributes to a corporate ethos of a "culture of life."

The term "culture of life" comes from an encyclical delivered by Pope John Paul II entitled *Evangelium Vitae*, or the "Gospel of Life." Pope John Paul II spoke at length about opposing forces in our society that he termed the culture of life and the culture of death. This most famous line from this encyclical stated, "In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the culture of life and the culture of death, there

is need to develop a deep critical sense capable of discerning true values and authentic needs” (Pope, 1995, section 95). The document is a passionate plea for the Catholic Church and its parishioners to turn away from “what it views as the life-destroying elements of modern time—abortion, capital punishment, poverty, and violence—and lift up the human spirit with compassion and love” (Leonard, 2000b, p. A1).

Bush began to invoke the culture of life term in the 2000 election during a debate against Democratic candidate Al Gore. When asked about the FDA approval of RU-486, the medication that induces abortions, Bush replied that he was concerned that the pill would cause more women to have abortions. Bush (quoted in Leonard, 2000b, p. A1) told the audience,

Surely this nation can come together to promote the value of life. Surely we can fight off these laws that will encourage doctors or allow doctors to take the lives of our seniors. Sure [sic], we can work together to create a culture of life so some of these youngsters who feel like they can take a neighbor’s life with a gun will understand that that’s not the way America is meant to be.

Bush invoked this same message in his 2001 decision to strictly limit federal funding of embryonic stem cells to existing lines only. He stated in his presidential address that he believes “human life is a sacred gift from our Creator” (Bush, 2001). He continued, “I worry about a culture that devalues life, and believe as your President I have an important obligation to foster and encourage respect for life in America and throughout the world” (Bush, 2001). After enacting an environment in which the destruction of

embryos for the sake of medical research is considered a devaluation of human life in 2001, it would be difficult for Bush to accept that same proposal in 2006.

The culture of life environment goes beyond embryonic stem cell research and is a guiding force for many decisions made by the administration. In a 2004 White House document, the administration listed their record of achievement on the goal of promoting a culture of life. The list includes legislation to end partial birth abortion, the Born Alive Infants Protection Act, the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, the Mexico City Policy, the President's Council on Bioethics, bans on human cloning, budgetary allocations to support maternity groups, and a program for those who are not eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program ("President", 2004). The culture of life was similarly invoked when Bush commended Congress on legislation to reinsert Terry Schiavo's feeding tube (Bush, 2005e) and was the underlying factor in Bush's National Sanctity of Human Life Day proclamation (Bush, 2002).

The speeches and policy decisions made by Bush about embryonic stem cell research and related culture of life policies were meant to gain and reinforce support for that organizational image, but critics have wondered if the image itself is an act of rhetorical magic. The first point of contention is that the culture of life appears to be specifically geared toward the "right to life" constituencies who would like Bush to overturn the *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion in the United States. This has not been possible thus far, but the *Christian Science Monitor* (Kiefer, 2001, p. 2) noted that while the Bush administration had rhetorically "tiptoed away from the idea of overturning *Roe v. Wade*, one of the president's first acts was to cut off money to

family-planning groups abroad that discuss abortion in their counseling.” Presidential rhetoric scholar Shawn Parry-Giles similarly told *The Washington Post* (Fletcher, 2005, p. A03) in an article on Bush’s culture of life, “‘Abortion may not be part of his rhetorical presidency, but it is an issue that he may well go at through his judicial nominees.’” This was hinted at by Bush himself who told Brit Hume that he would not exclude the possibility of asking the Justice Department to argue for a change to existing laws governing abortion (Kiefer, 2001). As Elliott Mincberg, the vice president for legal and education policy at People for the American Way, a liberal think tank, told the *Christian Science Monitor* (Kiefer, 2001, p. 2), “‘There’s no question that there’s a gap between Bush’s rhetoric and reality so far.’”

Part of the gap between rhetoric and reality may have occurred because the phrase “culture of life” is one that is meant to gain support and be a general blanket statement used to justify a wide variety of policy decisions. Lexicographer Anne Soukhanov (quoted in Kiefer, 2001, p. 2) argued that the Bush administration had “‘taken a fighting word like “abortion” and enclosed it in this amorphous, wonderful-sounding “culture of life” that no one could object to.’” This support-gaining effect is reinforced because, according to Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, most Catholics would not recognize the papal document to which Bush alluded. The second bit of sleight of hand arises, however, with those who do. As Kissling (quoted in Leonard, 2005b, p. A1) stated, Catholics “‘who know and care about the culture of life understand that Bush has no credibility to talk about it because he is “Mr. Death Penalty” in Texas, and that is completely inconsistent with the ethic of life.’”

When asked about this discrepancy between Pope John Paul II's encyclical and Bush's incarnation of the culture of life, former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan replied simply that the death penalty "saves innocent lives" (McClellan, 2003). In this way the Bush administration could justify continued reference to the phrase without embracing all of its tenets.

In this richer analysis of the enacted environment related to federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, we have seen not only the constraining nature of Bush's identification with the evangelical community, but also how this environment speaks to a larger organizational culture or corporate ethos. The "culture of life" phrase represents a rhetorical image of the Bush administration that is called upon to explain and justify a wide variety of proclamations, presidential remarks, and legislation. A culture of life gains the support that is required by Crable's model of organizational rhetoric; the phrase is a magical nod to pro-life constituencies—evangelical, Catholic, or otherwise.

Crable and Requisite Variety

In Chapter V, I argued that the lack of acceptance for the Bush administration's attempt to include private accounts as a part of Social Security reform was due to a conflict of requisite variety between the straightforward rhetorical construction of the problems facing Social Security and the convoluted rhetorical construction of the proposal for private accounts. From Crable's perspective, we must additionally ask how this conflict could have occurred, and the model of organizational rhetoric provides us with some interesting answers.

Overall, the conflict of requisite variety can be traced to an emphasis on support for the notion of a Social Security crisis rather than on actually solving that crisis. Advocates of the existing program often state that “the talk of a crisis in Social Security is not based in reality, but is instead a tool of manipulation” (Hardy & Hazelrigg, 2007, p. 68). Whether or not the talk of a crisis is intended to manipulate audiences is beyond my ability to determine, but there is evidence that the push for Social Security reform prioritized public acceptance of Social Security bankruptcy over a plan that would make the problem solvent for the future. As more and more people began to question what private accounts would do to the existing Social Security program, the Bush administration admitted that private accounts do not ensure long-term solvency for the program. Solvency would require more money to go into the system rather than less, but private accounts would divert money away from Social Security which, in combination with the huge costs of starting the new program, would necessarily cause a benefits reduction. This alone may have contributed to the lack of support because, as Machiavelli (1971, p. 282) noted, “Men are quicker to forget the death of their father than the loss of their inheritance.” As an attempt to offset this feature of his plan, Bush claimed that personal accounts would be one component of a reformed system that he eventually revealed may make use of progressive indexing of benefits. As Bush (2005g) stated,

That’s long Washington words for this: Right now benefits rise at the rate of wage increases. And so I proposed that the poor Americans, those at the lower end of the income scale, have their benefits continue to rise with ages; and that

the upper-income folks have their benefits rise with inflation. In other words, all benefits go up, one set of benefits faster than the others. And if we're able to implement that plan, that solves a significant portion of the solvency issue for Social Security.

In discussions of reform, the administration stated that personal accounts offer higher rates of return but that progressive indexing “would put Social Security on the path to fiscal balance” (White House Office of Communications, 2005) —a claim that personal accounts cannot make (Altman, 2006). Former Reagan policy adviser Peter Ferrara also noted the fact that private accounts do not ensure solvency. He stated, “‘I can’t understand why this White House staff sends the president out to sell personal savings accounts for Social Security with the message that they don’t really solve the problem’” (quoted in Hallow, 2005, p. A04). He continued, “‘Is it any wonder then that the more the president talks about personal accounts, the lower they sink in the polls?’” (quoted in Hallow, 2005, p. A04) After it was clear that the public simply would not support private accounts, the administration added the progressive indexing schedule to the President’s proposal. By that time, however, it was too late; gains in public opinion could not be made.

The Social Security Administration also participated in making the case for a Social Security crisis without advocating a solution. As Conason (2005, p. 2) stated, “‘Social Security Administration officials have radically changed the agency’s ‘communications strategy,’ from assuring workers that the program will be there when they retire to warning repeatedly that it is ‘unsustainable’ and ‘underfinanced’ and ‘must

change.”” This strategy, in combination with the White House’s repeated messages of the program’s fiscal doom, was successful. In March of 2005 over two thirds of Americans believed that Social Security, if left unchanged, would be headed toward bankruptcy (Weisman, 2005).

The success of the crisis campaign, however, did not lead to support for private accounts. I have already discussed requisite variety in conjunction with Social Security reform—both the oversimplification of the problem and the complexity of the solution—and Crable’s elements of organizational rhetoric further enrich this analysis; perceived circumstances and sets, and the sleight of hand there within, are especially relevant to this case.

One of the strongest cases for the Bush’s administration’s rhetorical magic is related to its favorite statistic regarding the number of workers per beneficiary who finance the existing Social Security system. During the nationwide tour, Bush and his associates frequently reminded audiences that in 1950 there were 16 workers paying for every beneficiary of the system, a drastic difference from the three workers per beneficiary in 2005 and the two or so workers who would be forced to carry beneficiaries in the future. As Hiltzik (2005, p. 116) noted, “The persistent misconceptions about the ratio’s significance have proved harder to kill than Rasputin.” The misconceptions stem from Altman’s (2006, p. 274) observation that “the 16-to-1 ratio is a figure plucked from 1950, the year that Social Security expanded to cover millions of theretofore uncovered workers: farm workers, domestic workers, and others.” The significance of this is that 1950 is technically a “start-up” year where although there

were many new people paying into the system, there was not an increase in the number of people receiving benefits. Altman (2006, pp. 274-275) continued,

The president could have just as accurately have said that in 1945, the ratio of workers to beneficiaries was 42 workers paying in for every one beneficiary or the equally accurate but misleading ratio from 1937, 26 million workers paying in for about a dozen beneficiaries.

This kind of rhetorical sleight of hand is particularly difficult to eradicate because the statistic is technically true. It just does not have the meaning in context that was actively promoted by the Bush administration.

The year chosen for consideration by the administration is problematic, but the perceived circumstances are misleading on another account: The statistic provided by Bush does not take into account advances in the economy between 1950 and 2005 or looking forward into the future. As Baker and Weisbrot (1999, p. 32) noted,

To say that Social Security will go broke because of the declining number of workers per retiree is like saying that we should be very hungry right now because the percentage of the workforce in agriculture has declined from 5.1 to 1.1 over the last 40 years. The problem is that simple dependency ratios do not take into account productivity increases.

This second bit of rhetorical magic further shows that perceived circumstances are more important than situating circumstances in their original context. This can lead to confusion and unfounded beliefs on the part of the audiences who hear the message.

The economic output of the economy is expected to grow in coming years, but even if productivity slows over the course of the next decades, the workers-per-beneficiary ratio misses on a third account. Santow and Santow (2005, p. 89) argued that while the ratio is important, “it should be pointed out that the trustees built this adversity into their estimates.” In other words, it is accounted for in all of the trustees’ projections—the optimistic and the pessimistic. The administration specifically drew from the most pessimistic of the trustees’ actuarial projections for Social Security during the push for reform and presented statistics from years that misled the public regarding the circumstances of Social Security. Those circumstances, as depicted by the administration, are rightly characterized as “perceived” as the administration painted a carefully selected version of the circumstances rather than the version that is more in line with general beliefs of Social Security’s future.

The second area of sleight of hand in Bush’s campaign to reform Social Security involves the forum for the conversations about the state of Social Security. Although the stops made by Bush appeared to be open town hall-style discussions about Social Security, they were actually planned at every level. Tickets were distributed to supporters before the event, and those who were considered to be against Bush’s policies were blocked from attending the events in several communities—even if they had tickets (Hutcheson, 2005). Panelists who spoke on stage were actually “handpicked supporters” (VandeHei & Allen, 2005a, p. A01) of Bush’s policies and several had family connections to the administration. Although the set appeared to be one that encouraged

frank discussion of an important social program, the reality of events was that they functioned more as pep rallies among supporters rather than forums for discussion.

Rhetorical sleight of hand was further a factor in the language used by scriptwriters to describe the Bush proposal. For years, those who advocated a Bush-style plan spoke of “private accounts” and “privatization” of the system. The Bush administration, however, tried to eliminate this frame because it discouraged support for the plan. As Altman (2006, p. 266) revealed,

Prior to the midterm elections in 2002, Republican pollsters discovered that the terms “privatization” of Social Security and “private accounts” did not play well. Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster and consultant, drafted a memorandum entitled “The 14 Words Never to Use.” The second word and phrase on the list were “privatization” and “private accounts.”

Luntz found that terms such as “personalization” and “personal accounts” were more appealing to audience because ““personalizing Social Security suggests ownership and control over your retirement savings, while privatizing it suggests a profit and winners and losers”” (Altman, 2006, p. 267). To help ensure that staff members of the Treasury Department and Social Security Administration used the more appealing language, Luntz (quoted in Conason, 2005, p. 22) suggested, ““If necessary, do what I do and institute a strict policy among your staff that anytime someone uses either “privatize” or “individual” in the context of Social Security, they must pay you \$50. It works.””

Whether or not Bush was trying to avoid the \$50 fine, his rhetoric reflected the qualities of the terms emphasized by Luntz. During Bush’s visit to Montana an audience

member asked, “My question is, as this privatization of Social Security comes into effect, who will manage that? Has that been talked about at this point?” (Bush, 2005a)

Bush (2005a) responded with the following:

I would call it, personal retirement accounts, is the proper terminology, because it basically means, you own it. See, privatization says the whole thing changes.

Not true. A portion, as I said, 4 percent ultimately, of the money that you earn can go into a personal account that you call your own. Who manages it? You do.

You make the decisions.

Luntz would be proud. Not only had Bush corrected the audience member on the appropriate term, he also tied it to his overarching theme of an ownership society.

Although the policy had not changed, the language had.

Representation and sleight of hand played important roles in the rhetoric of the Bush administration regarding Social Security reform. Indeed, even the notion of private accounts and the idea of Social Security crisis are built on contradictory views of the future. In its projections about exhaustion dates and the deficits facing Social Security, the administration drew from pessimistic reports given by the Social Security Board of Trustees that predict slow economic growth in the next 75 years. If their predictions are right, the last place people would want to put their money is in the stock market. The market simply will not be able to reproduce the historically high rates of return we have seen in the past. As Santow and Santow (2005, p. 88; see also Conason, 2005) stated, “Obviously, if the economic growth rate slumps to only 1.8 percent and stays there, the one place not to be invested would be the stock market.” If, however, the

Trustees are wrong and the economy will grow at rates higher than forecasted, then Social Security will be strong. Baker and Weisbrot (1999, p. 1) concluded, “If the economy were to grow at 1998’s rate, for example, the system would never run short of money.” Assuming a healthier rate of economic growth pushes the first year Social Security will pay more in benefits than it receives in payroll taxes into the future; the year the Social Security trust fund will be depleted is similarly delayed—potentially forever.

Despite this alternative future for Social Security, the administration emphasized crisis and bankruptcy rhetoric in its discussions of reform for very practical reasons. . As Republican pollster Bill McInturff stated in *The Washington Post* (Allen, 2005a, p. A04), terminology such as “bankrupt” is important because in order ““to develop support for major social change, the status quo has to be scarier than the change.”” The question becomes whose status quo or perceived circumstances do we believe? In the case of Social Security, the public’s view of the program did not align with the administration’s, causing an extreme lack of support for the program. Further, although the public felt that the future of Social Security depicted by the administration was scarier than the status quo, they believed private accounts to be the scariest of all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has applied Weick’s theory of organizing and Crable’s theory of the fourth system of rhetoric to provide a richer analysis of presidential rhetoric that more accurately reflects the realities of the White House than what has been possible up to this point. Through the arguments for the administration as a tightly

coupled system, the constraining nature of the enacted environment on embryonic stem cell policy, and the conflict of requisite variety in the push for Social Security reform, I have attempted to provide an entry for organizational scholars into the world of political rhetoric. This interdisciplinary approach to presidential studies complicates the standard typologies of White House organization, our notions of presidential decision-making, and the authors and purposes of presidential rhetoric. Weick leads us to examine the discursive, communicative nature of organizational sense- and decision-making while Crable situates those findings in the context of an overarching system of organizational rhetoric, and this contributes to the existing literature in several ways.

First, Weick encourages scholars to look at how we talk about environments and decisions. This is a practical approach for organizational communication because, as Warren Buffet once stated, “In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield” (quoted in Moore, 2006). Weick’s theory of sensemaking, however, is also appropriate for studies of presidential administrations and their decision-making processes. As Donald Rumsfeld (2001) wrote in the *Wall Street Journal’s OpinionJournal* at the beginning of George W. Bush’s term as president, “doing the job” in the White House requires members of the administration to “plan backward as well as forward,” highlighting the notion that presidents and administrations may make decisions and then search for the appropriate problems or not know what they are going to do until after they have already done it. These statements demonstrate the validity of Weick’s approach to the study of organizing and its relevance to the important context of presidential and political studies.

Second, this blended approach takes seriously the argument made by Crable that all rhetoric is organizational rhetoric. Rumsfeld (2001) advised White House staff members, “Don’t say ‘the White House wants.’ Buildings can’t want.” While it is true that the building cannot want a particular course of action, it undervalues the power that is held by the individuals who collectively represent the White House. Organizations hold the same status as individuals in our court system; they can sue and be sued. This indicates that organizations do occupy a unique position in our society, and it makes sense to engage in thought experiments and analyses that apply this same status to presidential administrations. This is implied by Rumsfeld (2001) who further advised, “When asked for your views, by the press or others, remember that what they really want to know is the president’s view.” This indicates that a unified public message and viewpoint should be portrayed throughout the administration; perhaps the White House, in the name of the president, can want something after all.

Statements such as these demonstrate that organizational scholars can and should consider organizational forms beyond either for-profit or not-for-profit businesses. Organizational rhetoric scholars are particularly well-positioned to bridge the existing gaps and help scholars in a wide variety of fields to understand the usefulness of a rhetorical perspective (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006) and the 2008 presidential campaign has already posed interesting questions for organizational scholars. The emphasis on grass roots campaigning, community organizing, and campaign financing ensures that students of organizational rhetoric can make significant contributions to the field for administrations to come.

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